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Christian Educators Journal



*Affirmation
or
Narcissism?*



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Spare the affirmation spoil the child



Bert Witvoet

Not too many people would question the assertion that children need to be affirmed in order for them to develop a healthy and strong sense of self. Affirmation is the nutrient that makes someone grow into a self-assured person who is able to love himself or herself the way the Creator intends people to love themselves. No one can love God or neighbor if he or she has not learned to love the self. This wholesome self-love comes about only if, from the time of birth, a child receives encouragement and support and the assurance that he or she is valued and loved.

Being a student of languages, I love to trace the origin of words. The word “affirmation” comes from the Latin word *firmare*, which means to strengthen or to encourage. From this we have the words “firm” and “firmament” (in ancient times it was thought that the sky was the supporting structure or vault for the planets and stars). So, clearly then, when we affirm people, we mean to strengthen, encourage and support them. (Did I mention that the word “encourage” comes from the French *coeur* or heart? To encourage is like sticking a heart into a person. Enough, already!)

In this issue, we feature a number of articles and stories that touch on the need for affirmation. Either a Christian school is in the business of affirming students, or it has no business existing. Teachers and principals who are preoccupied with building up their own self because of some deficiency in their earlier nurture are a threat to the healthy development of their charges. For that reason it is important that boards hire teachers who have the ability and strength to support others – people who do not take themselves too seriously but can take a joke, who can roll with the punches and realize that when a student acts up, it’s time to explore the underlying cause and not get lost in the symptoms. I clearly remember how in my first year of teaching a student called me a name, and I immediately told myself, “This is not about you and your identity; this is about an angry student.”

The humanistic pendulum

Judging by the kind of articles I have received in my

hitherto brief journey as editor of the *Christian Educators Journal*, I would say that the trend in Christian education, at least, is to stress

the need for teachers to be positive and caring. Most Christian educators are both idealists and people who care. Perhaps there is an awareness among us that we have to overcome some deficiencies from the past. Most of us remember or have heard of a time when children were to be seen and not heard. Children were to be “moulded” into whatever shape the adults had in mind. But these notions were challenged by the child-centered theories of people like John Holt (*How Children Fail*), Ivan Illich (*Celebration of Awareness: a Call for Institutional Reform*) and Charles Silberman (*Crisis in the Classroom*).

In the ‘60s, we saw in society a swing of the pendulum away from authoritarian models of child rearing and education. Parents and teachers began to focus on the natural curiosity of children and on the need to measure success by the child’s own standards. Some of this was a necessary corrective to textbook/teacher-centered learning, but eventually the new trend developed into a permissive approach that began to indulge children. One school had a sign above the bathroom mirror that read: “You are now looking at the most special person in the whole world.”

Inevitable questions

A neighbor of mine, a consultant in the public school system of our area, used that prescribed approach for a few years. She told troubled and dysfunctional kids that they were to think of themselves as being the most important person in the world, until she discovered that the system was turning out kids who did not consider other people important. The message had gotten through too successfully. So now my neighbor allows her own values to come through as she focuses on teaching kids to respect others.

She echoes what Barbara Lerner, a psychologist and writer from Chicago, wrote in an article for the *National Post* (April 28, 1999). Lerner traces the increased frequency of shootings by teenagers to the growth in our

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society of narcissism. "To the narcissist, other people have no intrinsic worth; their value is purely instrumental," she writes. "Many '90s experts don't understand this process [of applying moral standards]. They focus on self-esteem, not on esteem for others, asking only whether the child is loved, not whether he has learned to love and respect others."

And so today we are witnessing a swing back to a less permissive and more authoritarian approach. John Rosemond, a family-therapist-turned-columnist who publishes a bimonthly magazine called *Affirmative Parenting*, tells parents to stop worrying about developing self-esteem in their children. Children will develop self-esteem if they are held accountable for their behavior and are allowed to experience hardship and frustration, he says.



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Toilet training should occur by the age of two or the child will become a spoiled brat (*New York Times Magazine*, February 14, 1999).

The prism of affirmation

What are we to make of all this?

Earlier in this editorial I showed at least one of my cards. I said that Christian schools have to be in the business of affirming the student – strengthening the inner core. This statement turns out to be a suit of cards. There are many ways in which one can encourage a student. A teacher can do that through a positive attitude, which would include an ability to listen, a willingness to consider no question stupid and a concern for the well-being of each student. But affirmation can also come by presenting a student with suitable challenges and by allowing such a student the satisfaction of work well done.

Affirmation comes through recognizing that students learn in different ways and that academic prowess is not the be-all and the end-all of human existence. Affirmation comes through holding a student accountable and not allowing him to escape the consequences of bad choices. Affirmation comes by not stressing superficial differences such as economic or social status, looks and appearance, skin color, handicap and whatever else determines status in our world of winners and losers. We affirm a person by seeing God reflected in her eyes, by envisioning the perfect human being he can be in Christ.

Personally, I don't think a child turns into a narcissist by being loved or supported too much, especially not when that love and support goes hand in hand with appropriate and timely discipline. A realistic understanding of our fallen state under grace keeps us from being swung left and right with the pendulum of a confused humanity which is desperately trying to create a better world without God. (Did you know that China is coming back from its one-child policy because it realizes that prescribed one-child families are turning out millions of little Chinese emperors?)

God's way of shalom helps us avoid these pitfalls. The triad of love for God, neighbor and self shows the direction we must maintain. But we should not stop rethinking what that, in fact, means in the classroom.

Affirmation



Confirming for Our Children the Truth About Who They Are

by Jack Fennema

Jack Fennema is a Professor of Education at Covenant College, Lookout Mountain, Georgia.

I was one of those non-descript children who needed affirmation but didn't receive much. I can clearly remember, however, the few times that an important adult in my life commended my performance: Jerry Decker, my high school history teacher, relaying that Coach told him I had played an outstanding game; my dad telling me that my mechanical drawing project looked better than the work of the draftsmen in his office. And there was Mr. Huizenga, who kept me after school in the eighth grade to discuss my behavior. That was one of the rare times a teacher actually talked with me. Just as if I was a real person.

Not affirming our children – indeed, a serious sin of omission. And sadly, children who need affirmation the most, often receive it the least. That is not the way it's supposed to be. *All* children need to hear and experience the truth about themselves. Jesus himself led by example when he said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew 19:13-14). On the down-side, however, Jesus also said that "if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea" (Matthew 18:6). A failure to validate God's truth *about* children *with* children is, in fact, that serious.

Jesus once asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" After they answered the question, Jesus asked them another: "But what about you? Who do *you* say I am?" (Mark 8: 27-29). Children have the right to ask this same question of their parents and

teachers: "Who do you say I am?" Or, even better, "Who does God say I am?" Christian nurture, both in the home and school, *must* answer this question for children, both verbally and non-verbally.

This article will cite biblical truths about children within the four basic relationships of life – those with God, self, others, and creation. It will also offer suggestions on how parents and teachers can affirm or validate these truths with their children.

The God-child relationship.

The covenant community has something very special to say to its children: "Rather than first asking the question *who* you are, begin with the question *whose* you are!" For the children of all believers are consecrated by God from the moment of their conception; they are declared by God to be holy. God says to our children: "You belong to me. I created you and have set you apart as 'godly offspring' (Malachi 2:15) for service to me and my kingdom. I love you, and

I promise to be your God and to provide you with all the blessings contained in such a promise."

Most psychologists say that children are born with both a need to be loved unconditionally and a need for personal identity. Kids of the Kingdom can have both of these needs met through their Heavenly Father. But these truths must be communicated to children by their parents and teachers, both in word and in deed. Our children must hear the words "God loves you" and "You are God's child" over and over. What is more important, however, we must treat our children as God's holy offspring whom he loves very much. The Lord willing, belief will be the result.

The child-self relationship.

The admonition to "know thyself" is an important one for our children. But they need help from the adults in their lives, their parents and their teachers. For children tend to perceive themselves as they believe these significant people see them. Our words and, what is more important, our actions tell our children who they are. These symbols and signals are translated into a mental image of self, the backdrop against which many of life's decisions are made.

The self-image of a child should be accurate, balanced and God-related. It should be accurate in the sense of being truthful, emerging from and in harmony with God's Word. It should be balanced in that an accurate view will contain both positive and negative features. It should be God-related

in that both the positive and negative features have creation and/or redemption links.

In addition to providing biblical answers to "Who am I?" questions, parents and teachers can affirm these truths through various other means. Greet or call children by their names, as God does with us (John 10:3). This is an important recognition validation: "I exist, and I am recognized as a separate and important person."

Keep your children's emotional tanks full. Through hugs – positive, appropriate physical contact is a human need. Through times of focused attention — even 30 seconds of undivided attention speaks volumes to our children. Through eye contact — The eyes are the avenue to the soul, and most important truths can be imprinted permanently through this channel.

Expect the best from your children. In other words, promote a positive "self-fulfilling prophecy." And ... tell your children that you love them. Often!

The child-others relationship.

Every person is born with the need to belong, and children are no exception. They need to believe that they are significant and important members of the group, whether the group is their family or peers at school. They need to feel connected with others. The operative word here is *community*. Children need to be valued members of a community, and they need to experience its caring relationships.

Christian families and Christian school communities should live in *I-Thou* rather than *I-It* relationships. Members of Christ's Body need to treat others as subjects rather than as objects. This reverence for human relationship emerges directly from our image-bearing natures, for to see and interact with another human being is

to see and interact with the likeness of God.

That is no small thing. It involves issues such as value, worth, and respect. But, sadly, many of the words that come from the mouths of our children are put-downs that objectify others. James writes: "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness.... My brothers, this should not be" (James 3:9-10). Parents and teachers need to establish zero-tolerance for words that demean and hurt, and words that "build up the Body" are to be modeled and encouraged.

Within a school setting, there are several additional things a teacher can do to promote community. One is to work *with* a student who is stuck or feels discouraged academically. It is really encouraging to have a friend who cares enough to help us out of the pits of life. Another thing a teacher can do to teach community is provide cooperative and collaborative working relationships. Dyads, triads and structured small groups or teams are excellent passage-ways into the broader community.

And teachers can provide opportunities for *agape* — sacrificial or servant love. A key way for children to feel as though they belong to the community is to express acts of kindness and concern for others.

The child-creation relationship.

Children rightly deserve the dignity that accompanies being capable of fulfilling a meaningful task. At the dawn of creation, God provided humankind with both the dignity of purposeful work as well as the talents and abilities to complete the work. The creation or cultural mandate recorded in Genesis 1 and 2 describes the kingdom task as caring for and developing creation or culture for

God's glory and for the enjoyment and well-being of humankind. To accomplish that task, God provides every person with various amounts and types of talents so that each aspect of the task can be accomplished.

Our children need to be told from a young age that human life has purpose — the unfolding and advancement of the kingdom of God on earth. They must also be told that they have been born as royal subjects of the Eternal King and are to develop their unique set of natural talents and spiritual gifts to carry out their kingdom task. That, in fact, is the primary purpose of their formal education.

Two things must take place, then, for our children to be capable contributors to the kingdom of God. First, parents and teachers should assist their children in identifying and developing their talents and gifts. It is crucially important for parents in particular, however, to begin with the children in the unfolding of their particular abilities rather than with their own desires or unfulfilled dreams. For talents and gifts are God-given, not parent-bestowed. Proverbs 22:6 can also be read: "Train up a child in the way he *would* go...."

The other responsibility parents and teachers have in the child-creation relationship is to equip their children for kingdom responsibilities. Biblical literacy is an important foundation for this. The light of Scripture must illuminate each discipline to show its kingdom relevance. A worldview that appropriates the full-orbed Gospel must become part of our children's belief system.

Parents and teachers are to affirm God's answer to the "Who am I?" question. Such self-knowledge will allow our children to respond authentically and fully to their Creator in the days of their youth.

Can affirmation be overdone?

The editor held a brief interview with family therapist Tom Venema of St. Catharines, Ontario. Here is an edited version of that interview.

Tom, you have been close to the Christian school scene both as a parent and as a therapist. Are you glad that there seems to be a stronger emphasis on affirmation and a little less on authority and control? Or have things remained much the same?

I think things have changed. For decades, most school systems (and particularly the Christian school system) seemed to endorse a philosophical approach to the nurture and education of children which involved a pre-set, hierarchical system. This approach involved respect for authority in general and parental endorsement of the notion that teachers are adults who enforce the parents' values and should, therefore, be obeyed.

The teacher was always right?

Well, parents accepted the fact that mistakes were sometimes made, but, generally speaking, parents tended to back a teacher's decisions. Teachers were classically perceived as the experts. Children were "handed over" to the school system. The differentiation between parental authority and a teacher's authority was either not emphasized or enmeshed, and, therefore, children were expected to "toe the line or face the consequences."

When did this change?

As the philosophy of individualism and "my rights" began to take root throughout North American culture, it eventually also took shape within the context of education with more recognition of "the needs of the child" as opposed to "the duty of the child." Therefore, the issue of "discipline," once defined by "authority" and "compliance with adult standards," became sculpted more and

more into assisting the child to make more appropriate choices through the use of positive and negative consequences.

Books such as *Children the Challenge* (Dickens) and *Between Parent and Child* (Ginott) educated the parental population to allow them to change from the Dr. Spock model to a model that stressed concepts such as "affirmation," "acknowledgment," "positive attention," "natural consequences," "persuasion, not punishment," "self-worth," "constructive criticism," "encouragement, not discouragement" and "avoidance of power struggles."



Tom Venema

Do you approve of this change?

From my perspective, as a parent and therapist for the past 25 years, I endorse the basic goals of this re-structured approach to adult/child interaction. I applaud the increased focus on the worth of God's children and taking distance from the punitive approach that says, "I am more powerful than you so you'd best obey or I'll make you pay a price which will negatively force you to cease the behavior which I have decided is wrong."

Recognizing that fear of punishment is not a healthy person-enhancing mode of parenting or teaching is for most of us not a difficult adjustment to make in terms of perspective. All too often, in my view, Christian school systems tended to endorse the old authority-laden, inflexible, hierarchal system of parent-child interaction. But this situation has gradually altered, been let go of and replaced with an approach involving more of a personal, mutually respectful attitude.

So it's all peaches and cream from here on?

I would not say that. A change like that – from a pre-structured, hierarchical authority base to a more personhood-endorsing, affirmation basis of interaction – is not without complications. My professional experience has given evidence of that. I have dealt with countless

parent/child dilemmas wherein the child's presenting behavior involved defiance, extreme egocentricity, low capacity for empathy and an expectation of immediate need gratification. This tells me that there can be an excessive "pendulum swing." I am referring to situations in which it appears that children have received too much validation and affirmation without having been told about respect for the needs and boundaries of people around them.

Is this a cultural swing?

Theoretically, this would seem to derive from the North American social value system of the '80s and '90s, which heavily endorses concepts such as "my rights," "I am worth it," and "I deserve the best." In conjunction with this, what begins as a genuine effort on the part of the parents to validate and affirm children and to endorse their capacity to make choices and initiate behavior rather than simply expecting them to be compliant and accommodating, has the danger of resulting in a one-dimensional mode of functioning. We are seeing a generation of children who seem ill-equipped to view their individual needs within the context of the bigger social picture.

Would you call that a form of narcissism?

It might be viewed as a narcissistic, me-first attitude, one which results in socially dysfunctional behavior. In most social systems (i.e., a school setting) this tends to precipitate reactionary, negative behavior from peers and adults which can end in broken relationships, distrust and limited capacity for commitment. We might encapsulate this behavior in the statement "unless your response to me involves affirmation of and concurrence with *what* I want, *when* I want and *how* I want, then you deserve to receive my scorn and rejection." A child (or adult) loses the capacity to empathize or rationally perceive the impact of his or her behavior on the well-being of significant others. Frustration, anger and isolation are typical results on peer, parent or teacher relationships.

How can that be avoided or corrected?

Values need to be endorsed. Children need to be taught the three-dimensional perspective of who we are in the world. Besides being in relation to self, we are also, al-

ways, in relation to others and our God.

Let's be real. It is a scary world. Negativistic ideologies are difficult enough for all of us as adults to discern. Imagine the challenge for our children. We are constantly bargained and ultimately indoctrinated by worldviews espousing the enticing tastes of secular "me first" visions of reality. Without solid, defined tools to use in the process of "editing" such perspectives, our children are extremely vulnerable to the confusion of "owning" such ideologies.

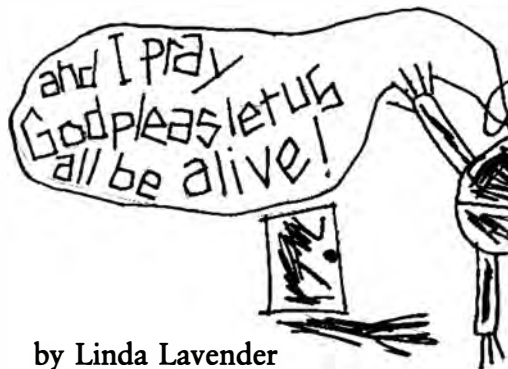
When any of us lose the capacity to discern, to separate narcissistic world views from wholistic God-grounded relationships, we unwittingly begin to wear the confusion in our daily functioning.

What role does the school play in all this

We Christian parents risk losing effectiveness in our parental task of equipping our children to have a healthy vision in terms of behavioral choices if we don't choose a school that can assist us.

Yes, at times a valid case can be made that we are "protecting" our children, that through Christian education we are isolating them behind a wall of safety. However, it is also a reality that without a cohesive, consistent value system woven through the very core of our educational system, we run the risk of exposing our children to life-damaging confusion without offering them necessary tools for discernment. An integrated, focused educational system does not necessarily construct walls of separation so much as a permeable boundary out of which a clean, healthy perspective of reality can be formed. A healthy boundary may endorse freedom from confusion and seduction rather than prevent freedom through a restricted vision.

The bottom line of my perspective is that a cohesive, caring Christian education system provides an arena for children to acquire the powerful gift of discernment. No discernment? A high risk of being swallowed up in the confusion of humanistic ego-centricity. Result? A population of children susceptible to a belief system which endorses narcissistic behavior – ultimately an invisible cancer in the health of any community, Christian or otherwise.



A School

by Linda Lavender

Linda Lavender has taught first grade at Eastern Elementary School in Bloomfield, Indiana, for 21 years. She was listed in Who's Who Among America's Teachers (1992) and was a nominee for the WTHI-TV Golden Apple Award in 1998.

Within days of starting the new school year, many teachers are faced with such "challenging" classrooms that immediately they can think of only one thing — survive this school year. I have had some of those classrooms in the past. Sometimes at the end of an especially difficult year, the major emotion I experienced was an overwhelming sense of relief that the year was over. My only rejoicing was to say that, in surviving, I had not done anything to devalue any child's feeling of self-worth; that each child left my room knowing that I did care about him or her.

As I suspect is true of many teachers, my teaching has in many ways been influenced by my childhood memories of when I was in school. When I was a child in school I was quiet, cooperative, very hard-working, a good student and well-liked by my teachers. Yet, my teachers did not really know me. If I had been able to write an honest letter to a teacher it might have read something like this:

Dear Teacher

I am here today. Teacher, please make this a good day. You can make this a good day. Please smile at me. Please give me a pat on the back.

Please tell me I did something well.

You see, teacher, last night I prayed to God. I asked him to please let me and my family all be alive in the morning. Don't let Daddy kill Mommy or any of us tonight. God, don't let us die. Teacher, I am here today, but tonight I might die. Please make today a good day.

Sometimes my daddy gets all mixed up in his head. He doesn't act like my daddy anymore. I am afraid of him. I know something is going to happen to us.

But at school I am safe and I don't want to go home. Teacher, you don't know it, but sometimes I watch the clock. When it is almost time to go home my stomach gets real sick. I feel like I'm going to throw up. I watch the clock ... 2:50. While my sisters and brother and me are at school and while Mommy is at work, we are all safe. No one will get hurt. I watch 3:00 come ... and I pray.

I have never told you, but sometimes we sleep at night all dressed and without socks and shoes on. We sleep with the windows open even if it's cold and snowy because we might have to jump out the windows and run. Our bedroom doors are all broken because my daddy breaks them down. My sister says I should sleep with my eyes open. She thinks Daddy wants to kill me, but I am more afraid that he will kill Mommy.

We don't sleep too good. Every noise wakes us up. Maybe Mommy is screaming or maybe she can't scream because Daddy is choking her. Maybe he's killing her. Sometimes we all

jump on Daddy to try to save Mommy.

Sometimes we try to get out of the house and run, but Daddy blocks the door. We run to get out another door, but we hope he doesn't catch Mommy. If we get out, we run down the road; or, if Mommy can get out and if we have time, we get in the car.

It's scary 'cause I think we can't all get in the car fast enough. Mommy tries to drive fast but we are afraid and Daddy is trying to catch us in his car. I think Daddy is going to wreck us. I pray real hard.

My Mommy is getting real skinny and her eye is all black. The windshield is all broken out of the car 'cause Daddy broke it out when he tried to get Mommy. I'm afraid. I'm afraid she's going to die. I have real bad dreams about Mommy being all dead in a big puddle of blood. In my dreams Daddy is chasing me and I'm running through the woods trying to hide but I know he's going to catch me. I try to hide in a big pile of leaves and he finds me. I can't move. I can't breathe. I am going to die. But then I wake up ... and I pray.

Teacher, I am here today. Last night I said a prayer to God. I said, "God, please let us all be alive in the morning. God, please don't let anyone die." So I am at school today. Teacher, make this a good day today. You can make this a good day. Please smile at me, give me a pat on the back. Tell me I did something well. Tonight I'll pray. Maybe I'll be back at school tomorrow.

I deeply loved my dad. He was the

child's Plea



victim of a mental illness. In his true self he was a gentle, loving man. I am so thankful to God that I do have some memories of the loving side of my dad. The only reason that I would ever speak of my dad in such negative terms is to alert teachers that there are students in their classrooms who are hurting and they do not even recognize those students.

Family secrets

These students are not always easy to identify. I was a clean, quiet, studious, well-behaved child. I do not know of even one teacher who ever suspected the hurt that was in our family. We were never told not to tell anyone. Yet, as far as I know, not one of us ever told even our best friends. I personally never told a teacher or a friend. It was not until after my family began to heal and not until after my father's death that I even began to speak of it. These students who are in the midst of a family crisis may not tell you. Yet, I know that if we watch closely enough, there are signs which may be as elusive as a child who watches the clock as it nears time to go home, or a child who never invites a friend to go home with him.

Structure and peace

There are very tough years and times of stress in all classrooms. Discipline is necessary. A child who has an unstable family desires discipline, structure and stability in the classroom. At least I did. I had a deep need to feel that there were limits in the classroom. I needed the feeling of

safety that comes from routine and some predictability in my school day (I am not saying I needed boredom and lack of creativity!). I needed the feeling of safety that comes from knowing that the teacher is still in control of the classroom. But constant yelling and screaming and anger are not discipline. A teacher who has continually to scream, nag and yell is a teacher who is out of control. It's a terrible feeling for a teacher and a classroom.

And, yes, there are years when we seem to be faced with such overwhelming odds, so many troubled and needy students in our classrooms, that we sometimes begin to doubt ourselves. We doubt our ability to teach. We doubt our ability to handle the myriad of problems that arise in those particularly challenging classrooms. There have been times that I have had to look back and remember where I came from and why I teach. Why it is that I love to teach. Why it is that I must teach.

My earnest desire

Even as a child I knew that I wanted to be a teacher when I grew up. I wanted to make each day the best that it could be for some child. I wanted to love, to teach, to bring some joy. I wanted learning to be fun. Now that I am a teacher I still want to give the gift of life to the children in my classroom. I want to give them seven hours a day that are a gift of love, joy and peace — hours of safety and learning. I won't always handle every situation perfectly, and sometimes I won't

even handle them well, but my earnest desire will always be to make a difference in the life of some child.

At different times I stop myself at the end of a school day. I think about each child in my class and I ask myself these questions: What did my actions and attitudes say to this child today? Did I love him or her as a teacher who really cared? Did I smile? Did this child have a good day today? Did I give this child reason to trust me if he or she is in need of help? Does this child believe that I care for him? Did this child learn something today? Is there a way that I could have taught this child better or made the learning process more fun?

I am so thankful to God that he gave me the precious gift of life that I have and that he let me use it to teach. Even through all the trials of my childhood God used each trial to teach me. He was teaching me to believe and trust in him. My family developed a deep love and trust and belief in a God who could deliver us in any situation if we would only trust him. God was so faithful. God in his love and grace kept us alive during those very turbulent years. What was sown in tears was reaped in peace that comes from knowing God. He gave us gifts of life, trust, faith and love.

So what about that quiet kid in your class? Have you noticed him lately? Do you really know who he is? Will you hear that silent cry that says, "Teacher, I am here today. You see, last night I prayed..."

Teacher — give him life, get him help, make it fun, make it safe.

To Love and Respect a Child

by **Brenda Morrow**

Brenda Morrow has taught for 18 years in St. Clement's Episcopal Parish School in El Paso, Texas.

I watched them come in from where I was sitting. The mother came in first. She found four seats in the area where three seats faced three other seats. Two young boys and, finally, the father followed. The boys were loud and disruptive. At first no one seemed to mind: the nearby passengers expected them to settle down once the plane pulled out of the gate.

We were disappointed.

Children can be loud. They can giggle, pester each other, yell out excitedly from time to time. When they do so, they are acting just like normal, average kids. But not these boys. At least, not David. He was not only loud—he was rude, obnoxious and vulgar.

Being a teacher, I love children and enjoy watching them and being moved by them, but David tested me. He yelled and seemed to be deliberately egging on both Sammy and his father. His mother ignored him completely while she read a book. Once in a while the father would glare at the mother, and she'd tell David to settle down. David would ignore her and she would ignore him. His voice became even louder.

Then my heart broke.

The father told the mother to slap David to get him to be quiet. With a maniacal gleam in his eyes, Sammy suddenly began to yell at his mother, "Slap David, Mom!" As she continued to ignore everyone while reading her book, Sammy's chant grew louder and more menacingly demanding.



"Mom, Dad said to slap him! Slap him! Slap David, Mom! Dad said to slap him! Slap him!"

The mother disregarded him.

Then the father moved David to his other side so that he was between the boys. I could now see David. He was a handsome boy, but during the entire flight he continued to make rudely contorted faces at his completely indifferent mother. Increasingly impatient with her apathy to-

ward him, David goaded his mother, making faces, kicking her and trying to get her attention.

As I watched the whole scenario, it became painfully obvious to me that David deeply hungered for his mother's attention. He was so starved for her love and respect that he'd do anything to get a response from her.

Most of the time his mother totally disregarded him, but occasionally a loud remark would warrant a kick from her. Not a little nudge—David got a real kick on the shins.

His reaction? He became even louder and more belligerent. Occasionally, when he made a face at her with his finger halfway up his nose, did she laugh. With joyful surprise at her approval his face radiated happiness and he basked in the momentary acceptance. For this disgusting act, he got a cherished laugh from his mother. So, he did it again and again until his reward reverted to a kick from his mother or

an elbow from his father.

Now, the father's jabbing elbow was not gentle. It was hard and was followed by a threatening growl to stop it. David quieted down after a jab from his father, but occasionally he angrily pushed his father and told him to stay on his side of the seat. Toward the end of the flight, David's antics grew to the point where his father really let him have it. David was, indeed, inappropriately loud, but he

had been so for the entire hour-and-a-half flight. However, this time something triggered his father's anger so violently that he landed his elbow squarely in the boy's chest.

David held his chest and laughed hysterically. As his laughter grew louder and his face grew redder, I realized he was using every ounce of effort not to cry. The anger, the fury, the deep, deep hurt came out in the howling, pained laughter of a suffering little boy.

Finally, the poor man sitting in the same area as this family asked Sammy and David what grade they were beginning in school next fall. The father said that Sammy would be starting first grade. The man then asked David.

"Third," said David.

"What do you plan to do in third grade?" asked the man.

"Beat people up," was David's answer.

If this true story shocks you as it does me still each time I think about it, then we must be alarmed about some children in our country. If we wonder why some of our teenagers have no love for others or respect for life, we need only to look at the Davids of the world. Seventeen-year-olds who are angry and destructive didn't turn that way on their 17th birthday. The moulds began to solidify when such teenagers were six like Sammy and eight like David.

What can we do?

We can start in our own homes, where we must daily love and respect our kids. We must tell them – often –

that we love them. We must hug them, spend time with them, ask them their opinion and listen to them. We must praise and correct honestly and lovingly, as well as discipline fairly and consistently. Our children need us to laugh with them, enjoy being with them and cherish them – no matter what. Most especially, we must pray daily with them and for them, for their teachers and coaches, for their friends. When children are treated with love and respect, they are more likely to treat others with that same care.

What about kids who don't get that compassion and esteem at home? I'm not sure I ever wanted to teach a child more than I wanted to teach David. Not so much did I want him to know his times tables. I wanted him to know that I loved him and that he was, indeed, worthwhile. We can't save every David of the world, but the kids you do know—get involved with them. Let them know that they are important and valuable. If the situation allows, let them know that they are loved by Jesus Christ. His love is deep enough to heal any wound—even David's. Especially David's.

It is good to love our children, respect our children, pray for our children, for they are God's joy and delight; he loves and respects each one.

"Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these'" (Matt. 19:14-15).

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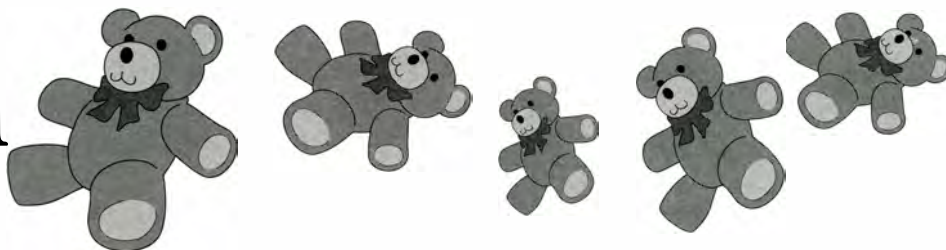
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Little Brown Bear



by Marjorie K. Evans

Marjorie Evans is a freelance writer and former elementary school teacher who enjoys her Welsh corgi, reading and her orchids. She lives in Irvine, California.

The superintendent of our school district was a gentle, kind man who considered of utmost importance the development of a feeling of self-worth in each child. He encouraged us to expect the children to do their very best, motivating them with praise and loving discipline. Consequently, they felt accepted and secure, enjoyed school and achieved.

Upon his retirement, his successor instituted radically different policies. He appeared to think of children as statistics; he pressured us to push, push, push them in order to raise their test scores ever higher.

Everyone felt the tension — principals, teachers, and children — and shy little Luis most of all. One day, Luis refused to do anything. He just sat at his desk, sad and woebegone, while the other second-graders worked. When I asked him what was wrong, all he would say was, “Nothing.”

At recess I talked to the teacher Luis had in first grade. She said, “Let me talk to him. Perhaps I can find out what’s bothering him.”

Finally she dragged from him, “I like ... my ... teacher ... but I ... don’t like school ... much. It’s not ... any fun.”

Then it’s about time we try to make it fun, I thought. So right after school I went shopping and found a delightful bear puppet made of brown felt. I

took it to school the next morning.

As I held it on my hand, it said, “Hi, girls and boys. I’m Little Brown Bear, and I’m really happy to be in second grade. First, I’m going to shake hands with each one of you. Then I’m going to sit on Mrs. Evans’ desk so I can see who does nice work and is a good citizen. And tomorrow I’ll sit on that person’s desk all day long.”

Then Little Brown Bear jumped up and down in excitement as he exclaimed, “I’m so eager I can hardly wait.”

The youngsters were enchanted, especially Luis, whose eyes sparkled. Never had I seen him work so fast or so well. Much to his delight, at the end of the day, Little Brown Bear whispered in Luis’s ear that he was the best worker of the day.

The next morning, Luis was at school early — tidy, clean, and with his usually tousled black hair neatly combed. He grinned with pleasure when he saw Little Brown Bear on his desk. That day he hugged the puppet, whispered to him and showed him each work paper as he completed it.

After that, Little Brown Bear often sat on Luis’ desk.

Finally it was time for a parent-teacher conference with Luis’ mother. He took her by the hand and proudly led her to his desk. Beaming, he handed her his work folder filled with pages of nicely completed work and with a big drawing of Little Brown Bear on the cover.

She praised Luis, then said to me, “I can’t get over how much my boy

enjoys school now, because he really disliked it at first.”

Pleased, I recalled in my mind the Bible verse: “Don’t keep on scolding and nagging your children, making them angry and resentful. Rather, bring them up with the loving discipline the Lord himself approves, with suggestions and godly advice” (Ephesians 6:4 NIV).

How grateful I am that the Lord used Luis to remind me it’s love, and acceptance, and expectations that motivate both children and adults to do their very best.

Untitled

good

the tiny letters on my paper
thundered in my soul
like one of your claps on the
back

(so it wasn’t the
“your stuff always
knocks me out”
you spoke to a friend)

to me it meant as much
praise and encouragement
congratulations and keep
trying
all summed up
with that one word

Anna Harrell

Graduate teaching assistant and doctoral student at Oregon State University, Salem, Oregon

Close Shave

Based on a true event

by **Lois A. Witmer**

Lois Witmer is a retired Christian day-school teacher who taught 15 years in elementary school, 12 in high school and two in junior high school. She lives in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

"Anton won't come in, Miss Hall," Jimmy said.

"Why not?" I asked.

"I don't know. I think he's crying."

What a way to begin a Monday morning, I thought.

I walked to the door of my first-grade classroom and looked out. There stood Anton looking very forlorn.

"Why Anton, what's the matter?"

No answer. His head lowered as if in shame.

Not knowing the problem, I encouraged him to come and join his classmates.

Then two big tears rolled down his cheeks. I bent down to his level and looked into his face. "You can tell me, Anton. I want to help you."

"My Mo-m-m cut my h-air."

"Didn't she cut it the way you like it?"

"No."

"May I give you a hug, Anton?"

He nodded. I pulled the chubby little boy close.

"Will you let me see your hair. Maybe it's not so bad," I said, hopefully.

Anton slowly pulled the heavy winter cap from his head. Mom had not only cut it, she had shaved it. (Nobody wore hair cut so short at this time.)

Now what had made her do that, I thought. Possibly this was to be a saving to the family. No wonder he felt embarrassed.

I sent a quick prayer heavenward as I coaxed him to come with me. I put his cap on his head again and took him by the hand. All heads turned toward us as we went toward my desk.

"Children," I said, "We need to take care of a problem that Anton has. Will you help me?"

"Sure," Jimmy said.

"How many of you have had something happen to you that made you feel embarrassed and you were afraid others would make fun of you?"

"I did, Miss Hall," Joanne smiled. "It seems funny now

but it wasn't then."

"What happened?" I asked.

"Well, I got a big slit in the back of my skirt just before the bus came." The class chuckled.

"I told Mom, but she said I should just get on the bus and go to school. I couldn't play that day, but just sat around. I held my skirt together when I got up to walk."

"That wouldn't be very much fun, would it, class?"

"No," chorused the students.

"Then my kindergarten teacher saw there was something wrong and fixed it for me while I waited in the lav. Was I ever glad!"

"Thank you, Joanne. Has anyone had anything happen that it took longer to fix?" I asked.

"Yeah, I remember one time I was really embarrassed," said Jerry. "My dad always cuts my hair and one time his hand slipped and the clippers cut a big chunk of my hair right up in the front."

"Oh no," Jimmy laughed. "That's funny."

"Did you think it was funny?" I asked Jerry.

"No, I didn't want to go to school. My dad had to cut my hair very short all around to make it look better."

"Well, Anton has a similar problem. His mom cut his hair very, very short and he is embarrassed. How are we going to help him?"

"Let's see it," said Jerry. Anton slowly lifted his cap. "Oh-h-h," the class murmured. "That's shorter than mine was," Jerry said. "But look!" He ran his fingers through his thick blond hair. "I can't tell where it was short anymore."

"That's right, Jerry. Anton's hair will grow back again. And while it does, we will all help Anton to feel comfortable. I don't believe Jesus would want us to make fun of anything like this, do you?"

"No," the class said.

"Anton, if your head is cold, you may wear your cap until your hair grows in. We will know why. But you may do without it in the classroom if you want. We know how you feel."

Anton grinned a slow grin and walked to his desk. Thanks, Lord. I took a long breath and began another week of school.

by John Slofstra

John Slofstra is a vice-principal who has taught biblical perspectives at Pacific Christian Secondary School in Victoria, British Columbia. In this article laced with metaphor and allegory, Slofstra tries to answer four worldview questions: "Who am I?" "Where am I?" "What's wrong?" and "What's the remedy?"

In the beginning, I was never nothing! I've always been God's good idea: part of his plan. He "created my inmost being, [he] knit me together in my mother's womb. I am fearfully and wonderfully made. I was woven together in the depths of the earth. All the days ordained for me were written in [his] book before one of them came to be" (Psalm 139:13,15,16). Oh no, I never was nothing.

To the contrary, I've always been something!

In fact, when God created the world, he designed a huge castle just for me. I know, it didn't look much like a castle at first. It was more like a huge, luscious, vacant lot just waiting for a castle to happen. It's hard for you to imagine it now because, well, things have changed. But back then – in the beginning – it was quite a place.

The air was so rich it was invigorating; the water so sweet it was intoxicating. And the colors! So vibrant they seemed to caress you as you

strolled

by. The birds answered when you called and – I know, you'll find this hard to believe – even snakes were friendly.

The greatest thing of all, if you can imagine it, wasn't who we were but who we were with. Everyday we visited with none other than YAHWEH. I didn't really know that was his name until later. In the beginning, we just called him Abba. He made us, so we were indebted to him, not like slaves – more like willing workers ... super willing!

He made us like him, he said. He called it "in my image." We knew what that meant. It wasn't so much that we looked like him. Somehow we knew that was impossible. And it wasn't so much that we acted like him. Considering how awesome he was, that seemed too big for us. It had more to do with the job he gave us and ... with the choice.

YAHWEH loved his world and he loved us. He wanted the best for us and knew that could come only out of giving of ourselves. He said that a lot, as if he wanted us to remember it

for later. So he showed us this huge garden that he'd made and said, "Take care of it – it'll be a blast."

And it was. We just did the things we knew he'd want us to do, whether it was with the plants, the animals or each other. Whatever we put our hands to came out good. It came kind of naturally to us back then. And if we ever did have any questions, why ... we'd just ask him and then we'd know. It was a happy time, a perfectly happy time, you might say.

On top of all that, it wasn't as if YAHWEH made us do all of this stuff. It never occurred to us that we should do anything else but the things that would make YAHWEH happy. But we always knew that we didn't have to do it. I mean, when you force someone to do something, it feels like a power thing.

A foreigner I met once talked to me about power but in a different kind of way. He said that when God made us he intentionally left a few things out. "YAHWEH wasn't passin' that stuff out, no way!" he'd say. He talked about power and wisdom and said YAHWEH kept all that for himself. I thought that was OK,

A Promised Castle

though. YAHWEH had that right. But I couldn't help being plagued by the thought that I could do the work he invited us to do each day so much better if I had a little YAHWEH power of my own. "All ya gotta do is want it!" my new friend would say. So I tried wanting it, and I got it – only it wasn't what I thought it would be ... not at all.

I remember that day clearly. The dew was still on the grass and it was going to be a beauty of a day. Not that we knew any different then. We were working in the garden, and it occurred to me that things might be easier for everyone if, rather than having everyone work everywhere, we divided parcels of the garden up and just worked on our own.

I mentioned it to the others, and they thought that it seemed a good idea. Except that people started looking strangely at each other, and the weirdest feelings came over me that made me feel ill – another new experience for me. Thoughts about the land, family and friends and even about YAHWEH that had never before entered my mind now flooded my senses and left me dizzy and dirty. And I knew it was clear to everyone that we were all thinking the same things.

I hid. I was afraid. I had reason to be.

Hell had just broken loose!

No more intimate walks with YAHWEH. No more perfectly happy days. In fact, no more garden either. No more.

I felt like a jigsaw puzzle from a sec-

ond-hand store. Torn apart with pieces missing.

Then, just when I thought it should all be over, YAHWEH provided hope. Just when the Creator could have confiscated the creation, he renewed it; and he did it in a way that changed the world forever.

We had to wait a long time, it seemed. He gave us the confidence that everything would be well some day. He promised.

Oh, the promises he made! Star-lit nights and long walks along the sandy shores. Rams and lambs. "And always sacrifice!" he said. Blood was important. Death – now our enemy – was significant. But we wondered.

And wandered.

We had good days and bad days. Days when we made right choices and felt like no enemy could stop us. Days when we made the wrong choices and felt cheap. I'm afraid our bad days outnumbered our good ones. By virtue of our bad choices, we destroyed so much that YAHWEH treasured. There were times when he must have felt abandoned.

And then, suddenly, YAHWEH spoke words that we had not heard for quite some time. "Let there be Light!" he said. And the Light came and showed us the Way.

"But the Way is hard," we murmured.

"My burden is light," he assured us.

"We don't understand it," we sighed.

"Seek and you will find," he encouraged us.

"Betrayed!" we cried.

"Betrayed!" the heavens echoed.

"Empty promises!" we complained.

"I'll show you empty!" he thundered.

We wanted to snuff out the Light. So we did. Again.

But this time, *all* Hell broke loose.

And then, soon after, early in the morning at Sunrise, God spoke again: "LET THERE BE LIGHT!"

Earth moved, and all heaven rejoiced.

So many things made so much more sense. In the days thereafter, we had lots of Spirited conversation about what was, what is, what will be, and who makes it all hang together. We looked at one another and we saw the Light. We wanted to be the Light so that others would know the way. We knew that's what YAHWEH wanted, too. It's what he'd always wanted. So Light we were.

Now, the more we were Light, the more others became Light. Sure, many attempted to snuff out our Light, but we knew that soon the world would become more and more illuminated, and we were sure that one day the Light would fill the entire earth. And then it would be a whole new world. I know that YAHWEH already has a name for it: The New Jerusalem. I know there's a castle there ... with beautiful gardens.

I know because sometimes I smell the flowers.

And their scent is good.

Living the future Now (2)

The Earthliness of Our Eschatological Task by Dr. Al Wolters

Dr. Wolters is professor of biblical studies at Redeemer College in Ancaster, Ont. He used to teach philosophy and worldview studies at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, Ont.

In this issue of the Christian Educators Journal we publish the second and final instalment 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 first part appeared in our October issue. The author began his speech by focusing on what 2 Peter 3:3-13 teaches about the Day of the Lord.

Let me proceed now to elaborate on the worldview implications of the teaching found in 2 Peter 3. Again, I will organize my remarks under four headings: (1) the biblical worldview as narrative, (2) the significance of creation, (3) the reality of the antithesis, and (4) the call to live the future.

I begin, then, by stressing that the biblical worldview is first and foremost a narrative or story, not an ontology or systematic description of the structure of reality. This is clear from the Bible as a whole, as it moves from Genesis to Revelation, but also from our passage in 2 Peter. In a few verses the apostle gives us an overview of world history, from creation to the eschaton, punctuated by two cataclysmic interventions by God. The narrative moves from a beginning to an end and follows a course through his-

tory that moves in a single direction. This is one of the fundamental features of the biblical worldview, distinguishing it from almost all worldviews, which, untouched by biblical religion, tend to be cyclical. History and temporality are given a basic religious validation, as the track along which God accomplishes his purposes.

A future-oriented narrative

In connection with this, the unilinear progression toward a future goal is also a hallmark of the biblical

Countless ads and commercials promote their products by saying that they are tomorrow's car today....

worldview. All of world history is moving forward to what Peter calls "a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness." The biblical story is fundamentally future-oriented, eschatological, and looks forward in hope to a better future. And that hoped-for future is not only a deliverance from the ravages of sin, with its sickness, pain, and oppression, but also the attainment of a further stage of development, symbolized by the movement from garden to city in the biblical canon.

The eschatological character of the biblical narrative is also characterized by that peculiar feature of its conception of time: the presence of the future, the incursion into the second world of the realities of the third. The kingdom of God is "not yet," but it is also "already" present in the world today. As the epistle to the Hebrews puts it, we can already "taste the powers of the coming age" (Heb 6:5). This is also what Peter has in mind when he speaks of "living holy and godly lives" in anticipation of the "new heaven and new earth." It is as though believers on this side of the Day can pull into the present the realities which lie on the other side of the Day.

It is striking to observe how pervasively some of these features of the biblical narrative have left their mark, in secularized form, on western culture. The belief in progress which has characterized so many European secular ideologies – for example, liberalism, Marxism, and feminism — is essentially a secularized version of the biblical belief that history is moving toward a future goal of freedom and happiness. And I always find it amazing how much contemporary advertising, at least in North America, plays on a secularized version of the "presence of the future" theme. Countless ads and commercials promote their products by saying that they are "tomorrow's car today," or "the computer of the future." A prominent electronics retailer is called "The Future Shop." The secular eschaton is defined by economic prosperity, scientific in-

sight and technological wizardry. At the same time, it is telling that the rise of postmodernism is announcing the demise of the progress ideal, although the latter still dominates the public world of economics and politics.

God loves his creation

It is necessary, in the second place, to stress that the biblical narrative is all about *creation*. The goal towards which everything tends is the “new heaven and new earth” which will emerge purified from the crucible. God not only creates, but also preserves the world through the three phases of its existence, despite the severe judgment to which it was subjected in the Flood and will be subjected in the Day of the Lord. He remains faithful to the work of his hands, refusing to abandon it. After all, it was the *world* which he so loved that he gave his one and only Son (John 3:16). As the apostle Paul teaches in Colossians 1, the redemption which Christ brings is cosmic in its extent.

That God loves his creation, that it is precious to him, is also an aspect of the imagery of 2 Peter 3. God is depicted as a refiner of precious metal, of silver or gold, who wants to remove the impurities from these very valuable substances. In this way Peter’s cosmic metaphor reinforces the biblical teaching that the world was created *good*, and that this goodness is not eliminated by the disastrous effects of the Fall. Evil can only exist as parasitical upon the good; it needs the substrate of the good creation to have

any subsistence at all. It is that substantial goodness which is recovered and reclaimed in the eschatological renewal of all things.

God salvages human products

Furthermore, creation includes the work of men’s hands. When Peter speaks of the earth which will be “found” in and through the smelting process, he is careful to include also “the works on it,” which I take to be a reference to the products of human activity. Just as Paul in 1 Cor 3:13-15 repeatedly speaks of the human “work” (Greek *ergon*) which may or may not survive the future fires of the Day of the Lord, so Peter here speaks of the human “works” (Greek *erga*) which will also be tested by those same fires. Human activity is part of the design of creation, and its products are as much part of the created order as the products of photosynthesis. Humans can do nothing without the possibilities which creation provides.

It is, therefore, deeply significant that the apostle includes, together with the created earth which is to be purified in the crucible, also the human works which are accomplished on that earth. Those works, which undoubtedly include also the works of culture, are part and parcel of the creation which God is determined to purify. There is no reason to doubt that computer technology and jazz music will survive, largely intact, in the future restored earth.

We need constantly to remind ourselves that it is the *earthly* creation which is to be restored. Under the te-

nacious influence of an other-worldly Platonism, Christians have long conceived of “heaven” — or rather, the new heaven and new earth — as an

There is no reason to doubt that computer technology and jazz music will survive, largely intact, in the future restored earth.

ethereal place which is quite removed from the earthliness of our daily lives. But there is no biblical basis for this Platonizing conception of the future world. Christians believe not only in the resurrection of the flesh, but in the “renewal of all things” (Matt.19:28), and there is no reason to believe that the ordinary things of earthly life — sports, work, art, business — will not be part of that universal renewal.

To be sure, there is much about these earthly activities as we now know them in a sin-tainted world that will be purged away by the purifying fires, and it may be difficult to imagine just what a sin-free world would look like, but there is no evidence that these kinds of earthly activities will themselves be discarded. In all likelihood they, too, belong to the good created

order which is precious to the Lord, and which he is intent on salvaging.

God will destroy evil

Although it is necessary, against various kinds of Platonic or Gnostic tendencies in the Christian tradition, to stress such themes as the goodness of creation and the earthliness of the

A significant proportion of [the cosmic order's] original identity ... will have to be separated and removed forever....

renewed world, it would be a gross distortion of the biblical story if we did not also emphasize the terrible reality of sin and judgment. I therefore underscore, in the third place, the central place of the *antithesis* in both the Bible as a whole and in the passage from 2 Peter which we have been discussing. I mean by that term, following the usage of Abraham Kuyper, the radical opposition between the holiness of God and the perversity of evil. Sin and its effects are a radical, profoundly distorting reality in us and in the world, and the judgment of God against it is terrible.

The Day of the Lord of which Peter speaks may eventually effect the purification of the earth and its human

works, but it will in the first place execute a severe punishment on the sinful perversities and distortions of that earth and those works. The entire cosmic order, polluted by the Fall and all manner of human iniquity, will be subjected to intense heat and reduced to a molten mass which has lost entirely the shape and structure of its original identity. What is more, in order for purification to take place, a significant proportion of its original identity (the impurities or slag of the crucible image) will have to be separated and removed forever before it is reconstituted as a renewed entity. It is not without reason that the prophet spoke of "the great and terrible Day of the Lord."

Like so much of the Bible's eschatological language, Peter's vivid description of the Day of the Lord is couched in figurative terms. It is impossible for us to translate this imagery of the refiner's crucible into literal terms. We have no way of knowing how precisely the judgment of God will strike the earth and the human accomplishments which it contains. But the picture which the apostle paints is perfectly clear on the essential point: the fearful wrath of God will have an absolutely devastating effect. There is a great urgency to the missionary task of witnessing to Jesus, "who delivers us from the coming wrath" (1 Thess. 1:10).

Pull in the future

It is this missionary task which brings us to the fourth worldview implication mentioned above: the call

to live the future. The missionary task is to witness to Jesus Christ, and that witness consists not only in preaching the gospel but also in living the future in the integrality of our lives. All of that is summed up in Peter's exhortation to "live holy and godly lives," literally "to be in holy behaviors and godly acts" (verse 11). How should we understand these "holy behaviors" and "godly acts"?

First of all, as we have seen, these behaviors and acts are anticipations of the restored earth which will emerge after the Day of the Lord. They represent concrete instances of the presence of the future. In such actions we see already embodied, however imperfectly, the future "home of righteousness." They are examples of "living the future."

Peter does not elaborate on what he specifically means by these holy behaviors and godly acts, but it is probably safe to say that they represent a kind of summary statement of the Christian life. There can be little question that in Peter's mind they would have included the work of evangelism, since he has just explained the delay of the Day of the Lord as providing an opportunity for all to come to faith. But the witness of the church is not limited to evangelism: the entire life of the Christian community bears witness to the gospel. It would have included acts of kindness and mercy, of love and compassion, both among believers themselves and toward those outside their community. All of this would be a witness, a testifying to God's great act of redemption in Jesus

Christ. To live the future is to witness to Christ.

But there is no reason to restrict these holy behaviors and godly acts to the specifically ethical life of the Christian community. To live the future is to show forth the whole range of the future world, in all its earthly and creational variety. It is not only acts of kindness which anticipate the future and witness to Christ, but also acts of sanctified good workmanship and efficient administration. Although the ethical was no doubt central in the behaviors and acts which Peter had in mind, this is unlikely to have exhausted his conception of the Christian life.

Sanctification and godliness are categories which apply to all of human life, not excluding such earthly matters as we mentioned earlier: sports, work, art, and business. These human activities, too, if done in a holy and godly manner, belong to the behaviors and acts which both anticipate the new heaven and new earth, and witness to those whom God longs to bring to repentance.

In short, the call to live the future is a comprehensive call. The full range of earthly life is to be restored in the eschatological future, and therefore the full range of earthly life belongs to the holy behaviors and godly acts which represent the presence of that future before the Day of the Lord and which constitute a witness to the unbelieving world.

An academic witness

But there is one area of earthly hu-

man life which I have not mentioned so far, and which is of special importance to your life, as it is to mine. You and I all have a special calling in the area of learning and scholarship. Whether you are a professor or a student, you are engaged — most of you full-time, I imagine — in an area of human culture which is both crucially important and highly secularized.

Most academic work today is ruled by ideologies which are alien to the Christian gospel, and there is a great dearth of solid Christian scholarship which is inspired by a biblical

Do not be satisfied with “covering the material,” or getting a good grade....

worldview. The temptation is great for Christians to take refuge in either biblicism or dualism, and to avoid the arduous task of applying a Christian worldview to the foundations of the academic disciplines. Koin University is one of the few places in the world which is institutionally committed to take up that arduous task.

I believe that learning and scholarship will be part of the new heaven and new earth to which we look forward. But I also believe that this is one of the areas where Christians are called to live the future, to engage in holy behaviors and godly acts, and in

this way to be a witness to our unbelieving friends and colleagues. There are some indications that there are growing possibilities to engage in this kind of Christian witness. The rise of postmodernism has had this good effect, that it is no longer considered impossible, by many secular academics, to conceive of such a thing as sound Christian scholarship.

So my challenge to you is this: let us join hands in seeking to be a Christian witness in the world of academia. You students, take seriously the calling that you have during your university years to wrestle with the issues of faith and scholarship. Do not be satisfied with “covering the material,” or getting a good grade; probe into the depths, to the level of the philosophical presuppositions which determine the shape of a theory, and seek to reshape those presuppositions in the light of a biblical worldview.

And you professors, encourage and help your students to do this, show them where good work has already been done from a Christian perspective, and in your own research strive to forge a Christian way in your own discipline. The task is monumental, and cannot be achieved by one individual in one lifetime. So let us stay in touch with each other around the world as we dedicate ourselves to a common task: to live the future in all areas of our earthly lives, especially the area of our professional calling as academics.

Idea Bank

Rand Walker

Rand Walker is music teacher at Abbotsford Christian Elementary School, Heritage campus, Abbotsford, British Columbia.

Visual patterns relate closely to musical patterns. To help grade six students understand the rondo form used by composers like Mozart and Beethoven, we looked around the music classroom for visual patterns. The children found patterns in the colors and shapes of classroom borders. They also looked at art prints for repetition of form and colors.

Next, we looked for patterns in musical compositions. The students searched for praise songs which might have an ABA form. Songs such as "Jesu, Jesu" and "All Things Bright and Beautiful" have a structure of chorus, verse, chorus. Then they listened to music in rondo form and were able to understand the pattern. For example, they could identify the ABACADA pattern in *Rondo alla Turca* by Mozart. Initial work with visual patterns had helped

Teaching the Rondo

them identify musical patterns.

An art activity allowed the students to express an original rondo pattern. They used uni-cubes to represent patterns of their own by plac-

ing the colors in a sequence of ABACADA. They also used tangram shapes to create linear and multi-directional patterns in rondo form. Using shapes, lines, colors and symbols, they created illustrations of rondo form for a bulletin board.

Some possible extensions of this unit could be the creation of a rondo using a familiar musical theme such as "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" or "Hot Cross Buns" as the "A" motif and an original melody as the motif for "B," "C," etc.

The children had so much fun manipulating musical motifs that they are now looking for these patterns in every piece of music I assign!

Rondo: a musical form in which a refrain recurs typically four times in the tonic with intervening couplets in contrasting keys.

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Stefan Ulstein

Sexually Explicit Media Foster Sexual Ignorance

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

Although today's teenagers are exposed to explicit and semi-explicit sexual imagery on television, the Internet, and movies, they are in many ways as naive and ill-informed about sex as their parents and grandparents were. Exotic sexual practices that previous generations of teenagers had only dimly heard of are now standard fare for one-liners on television sit-coms and Adam Sandler movies.

One of the favorite summer movies for junior high and high school students was Mike Meyers' *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me*. The verb "to shag" is a British equivalent of f---, and was excised from some British newspapers' entertainment sections. Meyers' jokes freely allude to oral sex, bondage and homosexuality, and they do so on a level that evokes raucous laughter from teenage boys and girls.

Given the glib manner in which some students parrot lines from such movies, adults erroneously assume that their kids are sexually well informed. A frank discussion with teenagers shows that this is not the case. The basic problem is that while the media portray sex frankly, they don't portray it completely. Some shows allude to condoms, but characters almost never get pregnant. Nobody contracts STDs.

Ask questions

If we want our students to choose to follow Christ in the area of sexuality, we have to fill in the gaps the media leave blank. It's pretty hard to get them to stop watching their favorite shows or to avoid seeing the most popular movie of the year.

A couple of years ago, when *Titanic* was the big rage, some of my female students were smitten with the romance, epic sweep and high production values. I asked them, "If you had a friend who was on a cruise with her fiancée, and sleeping with him, how would you feel if she was also posing nude for another guy she met on the

boat and making love to him in a car parked in the cargo hold?"

At first they resisted putting it in such blunt terms,

but several of them agreed that they would have a low opinion of such a girl. We began to discuss what might happen if she became pregnant. How would she know whose child she was carrying? Since the fiancée was a cad and the boyfriend a vagabond, how could she know their sexual histories and the risk she might have for STD infection? You shouldn't be too much of a killjoy in these discussions, but it's surprising how many teenagers will accept such questions if you acknowledge that the movie was well made and entertaining.

Useful statistics

Discussions with students reveal some startling anachronisms. One boy told me that he was concerned for a couple in his class who were practising rhythm as a form of birth control. Others still believed that withdrawal prevents pregnancy. I asked Planned Parenthood to fax me a document showing the effectiveness rates of the various forms of birth control and shared it with my classes. I consulted Planned Parenthood because some students would distrust the same statistics from a crisis pregnancy center run by Christians. The document dismisses rhythm and withdrawal as "not forms of birth control." But it also shows that no form of birth control, including vasectomy and tubal ligation, is completely effective. This is information that teenagers need to know.

A survey done in Bellevue, Washington, the fourth largest city in the state, with a high per-capita income, low crime rate, and excellent public school system found that the average age of first intercourse for a girl was 16. The typical girl began using birth control an average of nine months after beginning to engage in sex. For many, this came after the first abortion, a situation that remains relatively unchanged over the past few decades.

While America's teen pregnancy rates are falling, they are still the highest in the industrialized world. Abortion is the most common surgery performed on women, but it

is not a topic addressed on “sexually frank” shows like *Friends*, *Melrose Place*, or *Beverly Hills 90210*. As a result, kids live in a kind of parallel world where the media present a censored vision of sexuality.

Too much ignorance

Exacerbating this problem is the fact that most parents still don't talk about sex to their kids. When I asked my 11th grade classes if they had serious, ongoing discussions about sex with their parents, almost nobody raised their hand. “They think we know because we see all this television and movie stuff,” one girl responded, “but really, we get most of our information from other students, and they're just as ignorant as we are.”

I came home and kicked this around with my wife, who is a junior high teacher in my school. We came up with a few essentials that we thought every teenager ought to know, and I decided to address, in the broad context of an ongoing discussion about *The Scarlet Letter*, those essentials. I began with an anecdote from my early years as a high school teacher in a Christian school.

A senior girl came to me one day with the news that she thought she was pregnant because she had missed her period. Having learned to act calm – even when I'm not – in such circumstances, I asked her some questions: “How long have you been sexually active?”

“Just the one time.”

“Did you use any contraception?”

“No. We didn't plan to have sex. It just sort of happened.”

“What time in your cycle was it?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, how many days after your period did you have sex?”

“I don't know. Why?”

Don't tempt biology

At this point I explained ovulation, and the fact that although a woman can get pregnant any day of the month, her ability to draw lines and say no gets more difficult during ovulation. None of my 11th graders knew this. I explained that during ovulation a woman's breasts and genitals are much more sensitive, and that women are much more easily aroused at that time of their cycle. Hence, couples who have drawn lines beyond which they

usually don't go find themselves making a baby and then wondering what happened to their self-restraint.

I know that this is awkward for some kids to listen to in English, but every year a student or former student gets pregnant out of wedlock, and ignorance of some basic essentials is usually a big part of the reason why. An acquaintance of mine, a Christian divorcee in her 30s, told me, “There are a couple of days in the month where I make it a point not to date. I can be a nice Christian girl all month, but on those days I turn into a little tramp.” She was overstating the case (I think) but she really did avoid dating during ovulation. For her it was a good way to be able to live up to the moral standards she'd set for herself. She simply chose not to tempt biology.



On going dialogue

Many kids are like Doubting Thomases when it comes to sex. They want to believe, but they want the facts so that they can believe intelligently. We must explain biblical morality to them in an ongoing dialogue that takes into account their changing moral questions. It's relatively easy to get 13- and 14-year-olds to pledge abstinence and wear promise rings. After all, the very

notion of sex is still somewhat revolting to most of them. A year or two later it's a different equation. When they start dating someone they like, they need an updated sex talk. When they've been going steady they need yet another sex talk. When they fall in love, yet another sex talk is needed.

A much publicized national survey last year revealed the shocking news that the respondents most happy with their sex partners were “Christian women in monogamous marriages.” My students and I had some good discussions around that one. When they thought about it, many realized that their own parents conformed to that finding. They saw that their happily married Christian parents lacked the angst and cynicism of the sexually confused characters that populate movies and television.

A day after one particularly frank classroom discussion a girl stopped me in the hall. “I wanted to thank you for yesterday's class,” she said. “Nobody ever talks to us like that, and we girls talked about it all day long.”

Jesus said that the truth would make us free. Part of the truth embodied in the risen Christ is that when we choose to live a life redeemed in all areas, we live abundantly. That's my hope for my students.



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



Ron Sjoerdsma

Space Wars II

"So, Miss V., are you going to going to put a dash in your last name when you get married?" Mandy Spencer asked her teacher. Sara Voskamp finished typing the note she was writing to Mandy's mother and sent it to the printer before she responded. Sara had been unprepared for the constant pestering from her students about her wedding plans – plans that were currently taking up far too much of her time even though her mother was doing most of the work back home in Indiana.

"I don't think so, Mandy. I haven't thought about it much. What do you think I should do? By the way, it's a hyphen."

"What?"

"A hyphen, not a dash."

"Oh. Whatever. I think it would be kind of cool. I mean, Voskamp-James sounds OK. I don't think I could call you just Mrs. James. James is kind of weird as a last name anyway, especially if you wanted to name your baby James or Jamie. That would be just too ... I don't know. Not that I mean you're going to have a baby right away or anything."

Sara smiled and reminded herself why she enjoyed teaching middle school students so much. They were so wonderfully unpredictable. She walked to the printer, which was conveniently placed in the one easily accessible corner of her classroom, removed the letter, and handed it to Mandy. "Just make sure your mother reads this tonight. I really could use her help with the science fair again this year."

"You know, Miss V., you could have just sent her email."

"I don't know her address, and I wasn't sure she reads her e-mail every day. You will be so much more reliable."

Mandy shrugged and left the room.

Reliable and unpredictable. Like life in general, Sara thought. Franklin James, the man she would marry on Christmas eve, had been practically unknown to her just a few months ago. She had first met him when he was introduced as the new Hillendale Christian High School

life science teacher at the all-school get-together at the beginning of the previous school year. During that school year they had spoken to each other no more than three times. But then they had both attended a regional science teachers conference. They unintentionally met in a sectional on how to use computers to enhance the science lab experience, and extended conversation followed – a debate really. And out of that a whirlwind romance had begun.

Sara watched Mandy go, and, as she returned to her desktop computer which was linked to the other three newly installed computers in her classroom, she realized that it was that conference sectional that had been the beginning of many changes in her life. Frank had convinced her that Kate Wells, Sara's colleague who taught eighth-grade English, had hit on a great idea when she had suggested distributing the computer lab throughout the building. And she had stunned her colleagues when she supported Kate's mini-lab concept in August.

Their principal had initially put the brakes on, but when the study committee made its report in September, Sara had been a key supporter and joined the fight to move computers into her classroom. Among her eighth-grade team she was expected to be skeptical of these sorts of major technological changes. The transition from one big lab to the alternative mini lab concept was nearly complete, with community-wide Saturday "wiring parties" being a key element.

The transition in Sara's classroom had not been without its hitches because the extra things that make a middle school science classroom a good learning environment already limited her options. Her first choice for the computer space was in a cluster too close to the sink – a part of the room that she always had to keep in her peripheral vision for obvious reasons. Out of frustration with her own inability to think creatively about computer placement, Sara had convinced the eighth-grade team to help her.

That meeting in Sara's classroom shortly before the Thanksgiving break had begun with its predictable flareup. Bill Hamilton was grumpy, this time probably because he

had been the lone holdout for keeping the big computer lab. Jim Sooterma had opened with his usual bite, "So, Sara, how can we help you come into the 21st century?"

"Come on, Jim, you know Sara's way ahead of all of us when it comes to thinking about learning. Give her some credit for once." Kate had been quick to jump in with her typical pointed energy that often made them move past the bickering and get something accomplished. All this was the usual stuff.

But what followed was an unpredictably focussed work session led by Jim, who immediately after Kate's reprimand had said, "Sorry, you're right. That wasn't fair and it wasn't nice and Christmas is only a month away. Actually, Sara, I've been thinking a lot about this space. You've got the biggest challenge of the four of us. There just isn't an easy solution to getting four computers in here."

Sara hadn't picked up the change in tone immediately. "You're not getting my computers, Jim. Frank has really given me some great ideas on how to use them to do better science teaching, much better than trying to go to a computer lab once a week or so."

Frank's name had led to a momentary sidetrack, but Kate quickly brought them back. "Ok, gang, how are we going to solve this problem. With all your thinking, Jim, surely you must have some suggestions."

"Mostly I've been thinking about how Sara does her teaching in such a student-focused way. So she probably doesn't need a computer up front like I do for whole class instruction. I might want kids to show project work to each other once in a while." Sara was keenly aware that just about all of Jim's classroom computer use was up front on a big screen.

"I've solved that problem by putting one computer on my desk, and then I'll just run a cable from there to my data projector, which, by the way, I don't have yet," Kate said, looking directly at Jim, the chair of the school's technology committee.

"They've been ordered. What else can I do? But that's a good idea. Leaves us with three to put somewhere else in here." Jim paused for a moment, stood up, and walked around the room as if he needed a new perspective. "The way I see Sara using this mini-lab is pretty much as a support for her activities. Lots of small group work, sometimes partners, sometimes kids working alone."

Sara couldn't help thinking about all the disconnections she and Jim had experienced over the past four years. And yet he had been listening to her and maybe even learning a few things. "That's exactly it. But where do I put them so I can see what's going on and yet be out of the way enough so we aren't tripping over cords all the

time?"

Bill finally chimed in, "We wouldn't even be worrying about cords if we had just gone the wireless route with laptops." Bill had been trying to sell his wireless idea for months.

Jim stopped pacing. "You were probably right. That may be the next stage, but the board didn't seem to be quite ready to jump into an untested technology. And besides we had all the computers from the lab already. Too much money wasted from their viewpoint – and I can see it."

"Yeah, me too. It's just a shame to be doing all this wiring if we didn't need to – that's wasting money, too."

"Point made. Sara, do you really want the three computers in one group? That's what Kate and I are doing, but it doesn't have to be done that way. What if you were to place a computer at the end of each row of tables in an alternating way so that they aren't all lined up at one end? One here, one there, and then one back there again." Jim stopped at each spot and then moved back to his colleagues.

"Not a bad idea, but where do all the wires go? That's my biggest concern." Sara could just imagine the clutter.

"I think we'll be bringing wires through the ceiling to your room. We should be able to drop them down just about anywhere with a pole."

"Again, not a bad idea. Can I think about this a little bit?"

Sara had brought Frank in the next day to talk it over and he had been unusually negative. He was particularly concerned about Sara not being able to see all the computer screens from one place in the room. He also pointed out that she would not have the same flexibility she'd once had with her tables.

And so they had finally returned to her original idea of placing the computers on the outside of the room with monitors facing the middle, but this time Sara broke up the cluster, spacing them a good eight feet apart. The monitors were now quietly whirring around the room, joining the humming of her aquarium. The first few weeks after they were installed she had rethought

her decision many times, especially when the constant student movement and the clutter threatened to drown out learning. What her room really needed was more space and fewer students. But, in Sara's mind, that battle wasn't worth engaging. At least not yet.

Query



Tena Siebenga Valstar

Tena Siebenga Valstar, a former teacher and principal, lives in Fort McMurray, Alberta. If you wish to submit a question to her, you can find her address on the back page.

I don't need conflict when I'm busy

Question #1

It is the second last day of school, and we're in the process of moving everything from our classroom to the classroom down the hall. Just after break, two of my students are "at each other" verbally, and I've also been told of another student who used "foul" language against some of the students in my class. I feel I have so much to do at this time of year, and for a first-year teacher this is hard to handle. Any ideas?

Response:

It is important to reflect and sort out the issues. We know teachers are called to deal with the immediate repeatedly throughout a day. One can usually handle this, but when it comes at the end of the year, situations are sometimes more tense than usual. Being "out of routine" is one factor. Some students need routine, and when this is disturbed, they either don't know what to do or seize the opportunity to misbehave.

Secondly, you were moving. Some of us function well when everything is organized and we are in control. There are others, however, who "go with the flow" less easily. Although we know our schools are a community, the responsibility of physically moving the classroom materials often falls to the classroom teacher. One can choose to do most of this oneself or involve parents and, perhaps, students.

The next issue is dealing with your students who were not respecting each other. I suggest you handle this in the same manner you would if it occurred in January. Talk to each of the students separately to get their individual story, and then bring them together for reconciliation. These altercations may recur even though we might wish otherwise. There may be reasons for each occurrence, but we have to confront students continually with the

fact that showing disrespect for each other is not honoring the person God made each to be.

When students have done something contrary to God's laws, that needs to be acknowledged and forgiveness should be requested. Repeated offenses mean consequences will have to be considered. One would hope that by this time of year your class can occupy itself with an activity and one member of the class can take responsibility while you talk with the boys just outside the door. Do not hesitate to involve your principal, who is usually aware of the increased pressures at year's end.

As far as the other child is concerned, inform the child's teacher. I have found greater resolution to conflict when classroom teachers deal with their own students.

Remember that even in stressful times we operate out of our core beliefs: respect for others as God's image bearers and respect for the fact that we are part of a community operating within Christ's love.

What to do with a burned-out teacher?

Question #2

A teacher who has faithfully taught for many years now feels all she can do is teach the regular school day and go home exhausted from emotional stress. She is currently on short term leave, looking forward to a planned leave of absence next year. She has not yet reached pension age. We want to be fair as we decide what to do.

Response:

The beauty of a Christian school is that it operates within the context of a Christian community, in which we bear each other's burdens and build each other up. We are given God's word for direction in our lives. Very often our mission statements are Christ-centered and indicate that all the activities, including the policies of the school, are Christ-directed.

What happened to create this situation? What has kept her going, and why has it become too much to handle now? Has she looked at education as lifelong learning, keeping herself abreast of the changes in education? How



are the students and staff affected? How is the school as a whole affected? What is the most loving thing to do in the situation? How close to retirement is she?

Aware of this situation, have you been monitoring the teaching/learning situation in the classroom and discussing your visits with the teacher? We believe we are whole people created in God's image. Has she been able to maintain a balance in her life, or does her teacher role define her?

Has the teacher sought medical/professional help to deal with the situation? In one school system, a specific policy granted shared cost of initial counseling. The CSI plan also covers some of the cost of counseling.

Our attitude has everything to do with the benefit we receive from counseling. We all benefit if the teacher is able to deal with the issues and return to the classroom as a competent teacher. I do not believe a teacher should return to the classroom if she is not capable of doing a competent job. It has been said, "children are resilient," but there are far too many stories of students hurt because they could not bounce back from something that happened in the classroom.

Other teachers have been counseled to try another career and, even though they thought they would not be able to function without teaching (because that was the only thing they had done), they found happiness and far less stress with the change.

There is no simple solution to this situation. Each step must be clothed with prayer as we ask for God's guidance. I trust the teacher and her family will also be seeking God's direction in all of this.

Choose between student and teacher?

Question #3

Having witnessed an altercation between a teacher and a student, I suggested the student talk to the teacher even though the student felt unjustly treated by the teacher. Hearing the background, I allowed the student to proceed to his class and went to talk to my colleague, only to find the student had been quite disrespectful—something that was out of character. I've never had anything but positive in-

teraction with this student. I talked with the student again, indicating he needed to apologize.

How do I walk the line between being a supportive colleague and being an advocate for kids? I never want kids to feel as if it is "us" verses "them," but neither do I want colleagues to feel we don't support each other. That, in my view, does not build community.

Response:

It is apparent that the situation you described has put you in quite a dilemma. To respond to these situations in a positive manner, you must be well rooted in your belief system. It is apparent yours includes a deep respect for others and a desire to live together as Christians in a learning community. Sensitivity to the feelings of others as well as a sense of justice are obviously needed when you are working with others and teaching junior high students.

You did the right thing in speaking with the student as well as your colleague to get both sides of the story. Did your colleague wish to follow up with the student to bring closure to the situation? Did you tell your colleague that you had encouraged the student to apologize?

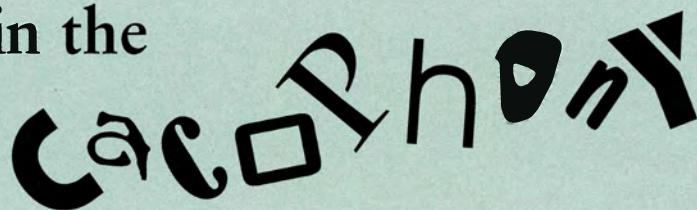
Ideally, you could all talk together – you could explain your dilemma, your colleague, his dilemma, and the student, his. There would have to be a desire to be open and honest. Only then could true reconciliation occur. Sometimes it appears we have different rules for students and for teachers, but God calls all to live at peace.

If situations of this nature continue, you have to speak with your principal as well as your colleague, indicating your concern and proposing possible action. One suggestion is to discuss student/teacher interaction at a staff or small-group meeting in order to draft a consistent course of action. That way not only students, but also you and your colleagues, know what to do.

Because so much of teaching occurs behind closed doors, we don't have many opportunities to learn from each other. Unless we learn how to confront each other in love, we will miss opportunities for growth. You might consider discussing an article on respect or discipline.

The core matter, which is our relationship to and interaction with others as image bearers of God, does not change, however.

Reading in the



of Pop Culture

by Jack VandenBorn

Jack VandenBorn is principal of the Houston Christian School in Houston, British Columbia.

Need a good read? In the middle of, well, a lot of pop culture? Would you like to take in something written with class — something with both chunky substance and spicy crust?

Try Sven Birkerts. Just listen to this:

"We now — owing to computers as well as broadcast media — grasp the world as hypersaturated. Too many channels, too many facts, too many images — too much that thrusts itself at us. Who does not, now, inhabit a world at once infinite and absolutely incomprehensible? The once narrow aperture defined by place and time, by the cognitive limits of the unassisted senses — William Blake's 'windows' — has been forced open. Globalness and instantaneity are our new lot" (From *Readings*. St. Paul, Minnesota: Greywolf Press, 1999. 263 pp.).

Add the windows from yesterday's electronic billionaires to the "Windows" from William Gates and the aperture gets levered open further once more ... by a 1000-fold-ocular bandwidth expanded from mega to giga. And cnn.com, Amazon.com, mp3.com, reel.com ... hive into personal realities.

Up to our ears

From the non-computerate world, books, music and movies clamor for the attention of North America. Annually, we have access to

- *some 65,000 books, ensuring, I suppose, a continuous attraction to literacy. It's a \$13 billion industry (65,000 titles x 10,000 per title x \$20 U.S. per book sold. A report on April 30, 1999, indicated 1.04 billion books were sold in 1998, down from 1.07 billion in 1997. This would make the industry worth \$20 billion.);

- *some 25,000 new compact discs, sliding into the maw of a \$13.5 billion recording industry;

- *some 300 movies, larding life in the city with a frenzy of visual opportunity. Just look at the film advertisements in a big daily. It's an \$18 billion world at least (300 x \$60 million average production cost per film).

Pop culture ... nearly \$50 billion's worth ... every year ... in your face.

George Will notes that in 1998 Americans spent \$7 billion on movie tickets, \$26 billion on books of all sorts, and \$450 billion on groceries. Gamblers in America legally wagered more than \$630 billion in state lotteries, casinos, slot machines, video poker and keno, etc. — and lost \$50 billion in the process.

Canadians paid for 100 million tickets to the movies in 1998 — three or four movies per man, woman and child.

Help needed

How can a school principal — or another more savvy participant in postmodern life — keep track of it all? How to put things in place and make sense of the times? Can we bulldoze it all into the junk heap of chaos theory — bloated somehow into a theory of culture?

The *Heidelberg Catechism* and the *Contemporary Testimony* of the Christian Reformed Church fail to anchor the raft of my tightened, trembling, straining sensibility.

Of course, that sensibility calculates inputs from influences alongside pop culture: pert Sunday services, novel and staid religious persuasions, the slogging inertia of familial and community

traditions, bulging news-stands, academic institutions, artistic designs, incessant television and radio, technological novelties.

Would that someone limn a "Cultural Theory of Everything" for the millennium; that we had an Einstein with deep-pocketed cultural analyses or a Christian Hawking splaying a "Long History of Time". But Sven Birkerts helps me — quite a lot really. He's a professor of English at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts — a writer, not quite 50, for the *Atlantic Monthly*, *New Republic* and *New York Review of Books*. He operated a bookstore in Michigan for some years. He's a teacher now, has a wife with two children not yet teens, and a lawn to cut.

Imposition of elsewhere

In *Readings*, he explains in the essay "The Millennial Warp":

"Never mind that we still live, bodily, in one place and

still relate ourselves to our environment with our bodily senses; that inhabiting, once the core of our self-conception, our at-homeness in the world, has become schizophrenic. To simple actuality has been added perpetual possibility. Upon the evidence present to immediacy has been superimposed the realm of event — the ever-present awareness of elsewheres and of the impossibly complex ways in which they impinge on our here and now.

“This is not, strictly speaking, an entirely new condition. It has been with us since the telegraph first breached the barriers of distance and began bringing the news from elsewhere into our lives. But the momentum that began with the newspaper and intensified with network television has now, just very recently, escalated past our already overly strained capacities of response. We cannot avoid it, blinker ourselves as we may, for the movement of the world around us is in a thousand ways orchestrated by incessant global awareness.... Everything is connected.”

I like reading Sven Birkerts. No, not just that. Rather, satisfaction penetrates my inward parts, the deeper ones, where my soul is. Like thirst slaked after a 16-mile jog in summery heat. That pleasure started with *The Gutenberg Elegies* five years ago. Two summers ago, when eight teachers read 20 writers and commentators, it was easily a Birkerts essay that won the popularity vote. Contestants included Neil Postman, Stephen Jay Gould, Oliver Sachs, Hans Kung, Plato, and Abraham Kuyper.

Earlier this year, Birkerts published *Readings*, a collection of 29 essays incisively styled in exquisite delight and atomic power. Topics range from the “Implications of Virtuality” to “Notes on a Stanza by John Keats” to “A Gatsby for Today.” Put it on your Sunday afternoon table, and next to your daily reading chair.

Protection against stimuli

So, where might we begin with a Cultural Theory of Everything? Physicists are forging ahead with their Theory of Everything. An Internet search showed 57,721,002 hits on that topic. The theory seeks to combine the four fundamental forces within one mathematical formulation and sideline all mystery ... and, maybe, God.

Is there some way to “gain the ground to wholeness?” In the essay quoted above, Birkerts draws on Freud: “For a living organism, protection against stimuli is an almost more important function than the reception of stimuli.”

It seems clear that we need to flee the clamoring saturation, to edit out events, to gate the intake. With discerning eye and ear, we must select from the 90,300 flaxen stems of pop culture (65,000+25,000+300), build sheaves for our linen ... and leave the weeds in their own

place. In doing so, we need to differentiate “the essences of soul and body” for the cultural garment we weave and wear, a garment we aim to wear and which is fit for the kingdom of God.

That’s the work before us. “If we have a millennial task, it will be to keep the blade of discrimination whetted,” says Birkerts.

Our editorial job is to cut and paste, cut and paste texts and articles, songs and sound bites, glamored movies and filmy clips ... into a poetry for seeing and hearing with godly satisfaction and appreciation.

While the cutting and pasting must remain a personal project, I would be delighted to learn the manner by which others in Christian like-mindedness cut and paste.

The end of news

As for me (although not always my house) television news has been edited out. No longer does the evening television news (neither 6:00 nor 10:00 p.m.) compel my attention. My brother-in-law changes radio channels at the first hint of anything that might be labeled as “news.” He says, “It’s all advertising.”

Only “Masterpiece Theater” and an occasional “Law & Order” draw my television interest. On the other hand, the Internet draws my Houston intrigue, clipping items from Toronto’s *Globe & Mail*, the *Vancouver Sun*, *Edmonton Journal*, *New York Times*, *Boston Globe*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Telegraph* (London), *Scientific American*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *New Republic*, *Slate* ... items not about news, but, rather, about the wide sweep of cultural experience — the arts, science, history, psychology, that is, articles about culture, pop culture, books, education, and religion. In the last years, my wife and I have located new pleasures in music, a sort of millennial quickening. Classical music had centered our family life for many years, but four years ago we attended a folk festival in Edmonton. Decibel levels beyond imagination invaded our beings, but my eyes sprang wet with new pleasure. Our van now resonates with a sub-woofer in the far rear. The sound is often loud, maybe too loud for Avlyn — not me.

In Houston, I began to teach English. I learned that stories must be the heart of that teaching — stories in the mode of text or film, sometimes in audio cassettes. It’s the passion, that intensified ambience of fictioned truth with which I aim to captivate our class. And at home. My reading has a new currency for life. I seek often to live in the reveries of reading, pasting them into the openings of deep cuts.

Cut and paste. For the millennium.



Steven VanDerWeele

Hear My Son:

Teaching and Learning in Proverbs 1-9

Daniel J. Estes, *Hear My Son: Teaching and Learning in Proverbs 1-9*. Eerdmans, 1997. 154 pp. plus bibliography and references.

Reviewed by Steve J. Van Der Weele, Calvin College (Emeritus), Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The Book of Proverbs is a jewel of a book: if it had not been included in the canon, someone with proper credentials would have had to compose it. But who would think it could be useful for the classroom teacher? The chapters are organized randomly, without any discernible pattern or sequence, overlapping occurs, and the succinct formulations are rarely developed. One is left to himself to interpret, qualify, enlarge, and relate to life these expressions of miniaturized wisdom.

Daniel Estes, a professor of Bible at Cedarville College in Ohio, makes us take a second look. His book complements an earlier book reviewed in these pages — *The Journey to Wisdom*, by Paul Olson. Neither of these examines such issues as the phonics versus whole language approach to reading, the merits of home-schooling, the role of technology, or the pitfalls of mainstreaming students with special problems. But both books get down to basics; they give the big picture of what it means to be a human being; they provide insight into relationships and discuss purpose, meaning and destiny. Both authors disparage, on the basis of the texts they work with, the pragmatic education which focuses on secular goals as the ultimate ends of life — goals limited to easing the student smoothly into society, prepared to achieve material prosperity and pursue pleasure.

How does Estes see the relationship between these opening chapters of Proverbs, focused on Madam Wisdom, and the modern classroom? Wisdom, it turns out, is a composite virtue, "skill in living within the moral order of Yahweh's world." Wisdom is rooted in trust. It is based on genuine knowledge about God, the world, human life

— knowledge essential to fulfillment and the fashioning of a human community in which

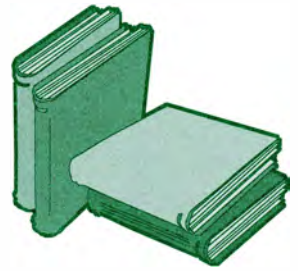
the individual can thrive. Wisdom acknowledges the force of the Decalogue — indeed, in the sense of involving every conceivable relationship that we experience. The words of the Psalmist come to mind: "Thy commandments are exceeding broad."

Negatively, Wisdom eschews illegal gain, indolent pleasures, illicit sex; it challenges the student to strive for success that goes beyond secular standards of societal conformity. Positively, it promises rewards congruent with a life lived under the aegis of the God who is the Creator and Governor of his world. Truly, concepts such as these should nourish and shape the character and motivation of the developing child.

How does the instructor impart this Wisdom? By a variety of pedagogical devices. Assuming that his charge is of a teachable disposition, he mediates the traditional wisdom, articulates the hard-won insights of past human experience through time-tested strategies, issues many imperatives, but gives reasons. He uses logic, illustration, pragmatic counsel, literary devices such as analogies to appeal to the learner. He calls on the student to be sometimes an active, sometimes a more passive learner. Sometimes he teaches indirectly, using ambiguity to challenge the student to reason some riddle out for himself.

How good it is, after all, to keep before the student the deadly rivalry between Wisdom and Folly. Wisdom imparts coherence to life. It makes for stability, competence, good judgment, wise dealing, integrity. "Education endeavors to develop in the learner the competence to function independently as a godly person in Yahweh's world." Yes — and Estes could have made more explicit what is implicit in his book — that in Christ are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; in him all things cohere. It is good that a child should get a glimpse of this awesome truth very early. But Estes's approach is a useful one — a reminder that, whatever our ages, we continue to be both learners and teachers throughout our lives.

Reaching and Teaching Young Adolescents:



Gloria Goris Stronks **Succeeding in Deeper Waters**

and Nancy Knol,

Reaching and Teaching Young Adolescents: Succeeding in Deeper Waters.

Colorado Springs: Association of Christian Schools International, 1999.
123 pp.

Reviewed by Norma Boehm, middle school teacher at Creston-Mayfield Christian School, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

If your middle school staff is looking for a thought-provoking and inspirational book to read as a springboard for discussion at curriculum meetings, *Reaching Young Adolescents* would be an outstanding choice. The rich blend of the dual perspectives of education professor and middle school classroom teacher clearly meets the intent of the authors that their voices “provide a refreshing contrast.” By alternating authorship of chapters, one voice effectively supports the other. Discussion questions at the end of each chapter assist those who work with middle school students in examining their own practice. The appendix includes “Ideas from the Field” together with the names and addresses of contributing teachers.

In a very readable fashion, Gloria Goris Stronks capsulizes the results of her own experience and research along with that of others in the field to give us a big picture of a middle schooler’s social, emotional, intellectual and spiritual growth. We are challenged and equipped to deal with larger issues such as developing a discipleship curriculum: frankly confronting students about being responsible toward one another in the midst of cliques, rankings, and name-calling; planning integral units; examining our methods of assessment; and sharing the task

of assessment with students so they begin to monitor their own learning. Also included are the developmental needs of a middle school student and the characteristics of an excellent Christian middle school. I appreciated the format of bulleted and numbered lists interspersed throughout the text, facilitating easy reference.

Nancy Knol’s insight into the person of a middle schooler and her spiritual gift for leading others closer to Jesus are so evident as she introduces us to many of her students and walks us through self-designed units,

teaching techniques, and the unpredictable. Some of the things she addresses are: shepherding students through illness, loss and grief; identifying the ingredients of a strong relationship with students; collaborating with the art teacher during an eighth grade keyword study of the gospels; and participating in meaningful worship with middle schoolers. Nancy’s thoughts are validated, enriched, and imprinted on the heart by the many examples of her students’ writing and art work.

A tremendous strength of *Reaching and teaching Young Adolescents* is the integration of the authentic student voice throughout, both from research on a larger scale and from the writings of students in Christian schools. This reflects the belief of the authors that genuine respect for each student is essential for building relationships with them, enabling us to reach and to teach them. Both Stronks and Knol point out that “middle schoolers are the most vulnerable children in school today” and “what happens to students at this junction between childhood and adulthood greatly affects their future successes and failures.” These writers help equip middle school educators for the “greater challenges” and help to assure us of the “greater blessings” as we play an important role in teaching young people how to navigate through the deeper waters.

