

A quarterly magazine for Christian day school educators

Christian Educators Journal

Bullies & Bullets



Volume 39 No. 3 February 2000

Does Original Sin Explain the Violence?



Bert Witvoet

According to a Montreal research team, toddlers are more violent than teenagers. More than 70 per cent of the 511 toddlers observed by this team engaged in kicking, toy-grabbing, biting, pushing, bullying and other behavior that even their mothers described as cruel. Said one professor who lead the research, "If young children had access to weapons, they would be more dangerous than teenagers" (*National Post*, July 30, 1999). The study suggests that, against all popular beliefs, violence is not learned, but children are born with the instinct for violence and have to learn to control their murderous impulses.

The *National Post* article that reported on the Montreal study was accompanied by another one that explained St. Augustine's belief in original sin. St. Augustine, fourth-century theologian and bishop of Hippo, was a firm believer in the doctrine of original sin. He wrote in Book 1, chapter 7, of his Confessions: "In the weakness of the infant's limbs, and not in its will lies its innocence." You can be sure that St. Augustine had read Genesis 8:21, in which God promises never to curse the ground again with a flood "because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood."

So much for Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who proposed that babies are born innocent and learn evil from their environment. So much for our educational and social institutions, which have largely been shaped by Rousseau. Not that they will lay aside their romantic notion of human innocence any time soon. To accept the teachings of original sin requires a huge tectonic shift. It means that our civilization raise the white flag of surrender and crawl out of the ideological bunkers that have offered protection against the "irrationality" of faith. Barring a quick return of Christ, the troops that rally under the banners of "Human Innocence and Learned Evil" will stay the course and muddle on. No calls for a general repentance will issue from its commanders. Instead, the cries for social tinkering will continue.

Witness the attempts made by the Canadian Foundation for Children in a current Ontario Superior Court case. The foundation wants the Canadian government to criminalize spanking by repealing Section 43 of the Crimi-

nal Code that allows for "reasonable force" to correct a child's behavior. If only we could get rid of spanking, goes the argument, we can reduce violence in our society. Fortunately, the government opposes this challenge and argues that just as police are given certain legal tools to carry out their duties as law enforcers so must parents be given legal authority to correct their children, including the use of reasonable force. Of course, the use of reasonable force has been all but banned in North American schools. It remains to be seen now whether the homes of the nation also have to fall in line with the "blank-page-at-birth" crowd.

The hounds are let loose

My support of the doctrine of original sin should not, however, be interpreted as a denial of the importance of the social environment. If it is true that every child born to humans can and should say, "Surely I was sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5), then what explains the flare-up of violence in our time? Equally sinful North American students in the '50s did not engage in wild shoot-outs and did not seem as angry and frustrated as so many of today's youth are. Where is the difference?

The answer must lie in the weakening of restraint-of-evil factors in North American culture today (I am using "culture" in the broadest possible sense of "anything that human beings give shape to," and thus I include family structure, school policies, entertainment, laws and mores). Combined with the doctrine of original sin, Christians hold to the teaching that God restrains both his anger (Genesis 8:21) and the power of evil (Revelation 20:2,3) from coming to full expression. Were God not to do that, life on earth would be completely hellish.

How does God curb evil? Well, he involves human beings. Human beings and their cultural activities are instrumental in determining how well this restraint works. In the death camps of Dachau and Auschwitz a certain cultural formation - the superiority of the Aryan race ideology - severely weakened the restraint of evil, although even there Satan was not completely unleashed. On the other hand, the 1960s civil rights marches in the

Southern United States helped to restrain the evil of racism there. Our educational and legal systems can contribute greatly to the restraining or the unleashing of evil. The lack of abortion laws in Canada allow doctors to abort children any time before birth without legal repercussions. The lack of funding for private schools in the United States and the province of Ontario makes it difficult for some parents to insure that their children receive Christian education throughout their formative years. Nevertheless, even though human beings play a significant role, Christians never let go of the notion that God is moving things to a predetermined end of judgment on Satan and his followers and of shalom for Jesus and his people.

Generational sins

And so we ask ourselves the question: What social and cultural factors contributed to the shooting at Columbine High School? Why did a group of teens kick a 15-year-old boy to death in a Toronto park in mid-November for no other apparent reason than that he asked them why they demanded money and cigarettes from him? If you asked the perpetrators, they could not possibly give you a satisfactory answer: "I was angry because he questioned me and so I committed humanity's worst crime?" That may describe the emotional state of the perpetrators, but it does not explain why they were not held back by pangs of conscience or feelings of compassion.

No, the answer lies in these boys' upbringing and in their sense of selfhood. It lies in the values that their society glorifies in its commerce and its diversions. It lies in the unbelievably arrogant assumption that science and technology can fix everything. It lies in the isolation youth experience at a time when parents are too busy to spend time with their kids. Or it lies in the fact that young people have been seduced by advertising and other external forces into growing up too fast — playing at adulthood, while they are still heavily influenced by instinct and emotion.

All of this suggests to me that original sin does not explain the differences between time periods, but generational sin does. Our society is reaping what it has sown. We have followed after alluring gods, and our kids are paying the price.

There is no simple solution to today's violence. But there is a path that leads to healing and peace. And there is a flashlight that lights the way. It is the path of radical obedience and it is the flashlight of God's Word. The Christian home and the Christian school can be mighty instruments for the restraining of evil and uncluttered channels for the outpouring of grace, but they will not be nearly as effective as they can be if they don't take a stand against the cultural powers of our time.

Too many Christian communities fail in their cultural witness because they simply put a little icing of niceness and piety on the secular cake. They worship at the same altars of sports, success, competition, appearances, size, wealth, comfort and power as do the self-declared secularists. And then we wonder why our sons and daughters are acting crazy.

Let's not kid ourselves. Whatever happens in society can and will happen in the Christian community. Last year a boy brought a loaded gun into a classroom of one of our Christian schools. Police led him away in handcuffs. There were no casualties, but the handwriting is on the wall: "This is what happens if you forget the commandment 'You shall have no other gods before me.'"



Note:

I would like to thank the students of Dunnville Christian School who were willing to act out bullying scenes so that I could take pictures to illustrate this issue. Let me assure the readers that these young persons are very nice people who would not bully a fly. On the front cover, the students are from l. to r.: Greg Termorshuizen, Nathan Mulder and Jared Lindeboom. On page 4, the students are from l. to r.: Emily Heeg, Alisha Bulk, Kimberly Schilstra and Laura Schilstra.

Editor

The BULLY in the Educational Ointment

by Arie Vanderstoel

Arie Vanderstoel started his teaching career in the Netherlands and has since 1978 been teaching principal at Christian schools in Bracebridge, Stratford and Drayton and currently serves as principal at the Christian School in Dunnville, Ontario.

Research in Scandinavia states that one in seven students is either a bully or the victim of a bully, and one in 10 is victimized by a bully. Recently, a 21-year-old girl in Sweden received a judgment of \$31,000 because she had been bullied at school as a teenager. Research in Catholic schools in The Netherlands concludes that 23 per cent of all students in elementary schools is harassed regularly by fellow students. Bullying is the fourth and fifth most common reason children call Children's Help Lines.

Tragic outcomes

Harassing and bullying may well be the most underrated problem in our schools. Aside from the fact that both perpetrator and victim suffer by their involvement, the consequences from this un-Christian phenomenon can be more tragic than that.

A few years ago, one seventh-grade student who could no longer endure being taunted by his peers fatally shot another student and then turned the gun on himself in class. More recently, the Columbine, Colorado, and Tabor, Alberta, tragedies come to mind.

Elsewhere, after an elementary school team had used a P.D. day to discuss harassment, a few teachers

complained to the principal that paying attention to this topic had been unnecessary. This sort of thing just did not happen in their school. Two weeks later, a harasser invited a friend from "outside" to teach his victim a lesson after school. The accomplice did what he had been hired to do and asked his "employer," who had been present, "Where are my fifteen dollars?" The parents of the beaten-up boy involved the police. It appeared that all students had known about the time, the place and even the price. Nobody had taken the trouble, or had dared, to talk to the teacher, not even in confidence.

Omnipresent pestering

Let me offer some observations made in an average Christian School:

A couple of grade-three students repeatedly take the hat belonging to one of their classmates and throw it away. The student picks up his hat and sees it promptly taken again.

Two second-grade students are trying to figure out who is going to be boss in the fort that one of them has built during recess. Both complain that the other does not want to give in. The other second-grade girls who are present patiently wait to see who is going to win so that they can join at that time. They do not speak up for one or the other; they just wait to see how they can profit the most.

Supported by some of the more recent publications about this problem, I can say that harassment and bullying exists in almost every school, that there are not many schools where it

is acknowledged (a recent Canadian statistic said that teachers are aware of only five per cent of the bullying that takes place in their school), and that there are very few schools willing to deal with it on a large scale.

Knowing from experience what it feels like to be a victim, I have always had an interest in students who may be subjected to bullying behavior from fellow students. I have discovered that it is extremely difficult to nail down incidents and victims.

What we may not always be aware of is that harassing begins already in Kindergarten. If it is not dealt with at that level, the victim will be stuck with the scapegoat syndrome until the time of graduation. In other cases, it is often the new kid on the block who fails to become accepted in an already established pecking order.

Who is the target?

How do harassers select their victims? In my own case, I was not a prime candidate for selection since I was the best gymnast in my class, but I had a decidedly noticeable over-bite; above all, I was the son of the minister, a Preacher's Kid. It was enough to stand out — to be "different."

Being different is the main reason for becoming a victim: wearing glasses with thick lenses, not achieving academically (or the opposite), not being of a certain church denomination, not being macho enough, having red hair or showing "buck teeth," not wearing brand-name shoes.

What do harassers do to their victims? A great arsenal is available to



them. They can ostracize a person, often for months. They can stand around the victim and depending on the mood of the group, resort to name-calling. They can take a hat and pass it around, or they can hit or trip a person. Other ways are: telling the victim to run errands or forcing him to bring candy to school, or, if necessary, telling him to steal it at the variety store and then taking it from him. If the individual or the group is not obeyed, punishment follows.

It seems unbelievable that children can do this to each other.

Probing for reasons

I once attended a conference that dealt with this topic. One of the workshops was led by a supervisory officer of a correctional center. According to him, a bully should not be excused because his father drinks, his mother is on crack, and his sister does other nasty things. A bully is a bully because he wants to be a bully. It is at that level that you must approach him.

From my discussions with such students I believe that there is truth to that statement. There are extenuating circumstances, however. It is at home that some children learn the art of harassment. They get little real attention from their parents, receive a great deal of corporal punishment, or are not corrected by their parents for their aggression. A child who has been harassed for years at school may go to another school with the firm intent of not letting it happen again. But she

may become a harasser herself.

Some students harass because it looks cool, because they think it is part of life, because they can communicate only via bullying, and even because they think it is expected of them. Another cause is the role model provided by parents. Parents can set a bad example by speaking about neighbors or relatives in negative terms only. Teachers can be cynical in class and, as a result, students begin to feel unsafe. They may convert their frustration into aggression.

Behind the scene

How do harassers feel about themselves? In general, they have a positive self-image. Often, they regard their victims as worthless objects with whom they can do as they please. They don't feel that their activities are objectionable or they do it without thinking. Are they ever sorry? As one bully said, "Sometimes I come home, and then I don't feel good about it. But the next day I do it again."

We may well wonder why victims don't tell their teachers or their parents. The fact is they may either be afraid of things getting worse, or they are ashamed to talk about it. Parents have certain expectations of their children, not only academically but also socially: "My child can make friends easily." A child knows about these ex-

pectations. And why have their parents call the bully's parents? They won't be believed anyway.

Then there are those children who smile at their

tormentors. They have taught themselves a defence mechanism and undergo the maltreatment while temporarily blocking out their own feelings. Some scapegoats think that what they undergo is normal or that they themselves are to blame for their situation.

Woe to the teacher who accepts the provocation theory. If we accept the provocation theory, we have also solved the question why Jews are persecuted, why women and children are abused, and why genocide happened in Rwanda.

Why this silence?

When harassment occurs, three parties are involved: the harasser(s), the victim and the rest of the class - the silent middle group. None of these parties will easily talk about what is happening. The offender does not want to talk because he enjoys the power he can exert over the victim. The victim doesn't talk for reasons mentioned earlier. But why does the rest of the class remain silent?

First, there are those who actively join in the harassing because either they are afraid that they will become a victim themselves, or they hope to benefit from taking part.

Secondly, there is the group which does not join, but doesn't do anything to stop it, either. They sometimes do feel guilty, but not enough to object

to the unhealthy situation. Thirdly, there is the group that really doesn't have a clue about what is happening around them. Finally, there are those who now and then try to defend the victim. Often these students are not present at altercations, or they have been silenced one way or another.

Take it seriously

So, is it all that bad for a child to be pestered on a regular basis? Just ask former victims. They will tell you how much they suffered. Even today, as a

result of previous bullying, they experience fear of failure, have low self-confidence and self-esteem, and feel powerless or excluded. As adults they often distrust people, even if those people mean well. They are always on their guard. From discussions with parents who are considering our school, I know that they remember all too well how they were pestered in a Christian school. They may hesitate to send their own children to another Christian school.

Why should we take action against

harassment? Because it's our Christian duty to stand up for the weaker ones in society, and it is inhuman to let a child suffer. Finally, it is not good for the development of the victim, the perpetrator and the rest of the class.

If the harasser is not helped, he runs the risk of continuing his behavior later on in his own family, place of work or in society in general. And is preparing our students for these important areas of life not really one of the main goals of Christian education?

An Anti-Bullying Ethos

by Arie Vanderstoel

"He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it." (Martin Luther King)

Teaching positive behavior should be part of the curriculum. In fact, behavioral skills, assertiveness, and other key skills for a successful life and career are often absent from the school. Check to see whether your school environment tends to be one of exclusion rather than inclusion, whether children are left to form their own cliques. Children should be taught at the outset to show respect to and dignify other children, and to be pro-active in their relationships to other children, especially those who do not fit in for whatever reason.

There is a whole-school anti-bullying ethos to which both staff and children should be genuinely committed. It calls for the following characteristics:

1. Know the behavioral characteristics of victims.
2. Know the behavioral characteristics of the bully.
3. Understand what bullying is and why bullies bully.
4. Believe that bullying is unacceptable.

5. Nip incidents of bullying in the bud.
6. Call the bully to account in a firm but kind and supportive manner.
7. Supervise the bully and teach more appropriate ways of interacting with other children.
8. Teach all children how to be assertive.
9. Teach all children how to spot bullying and how to intercede or report.
10. Empower all children to help both the target and the bully.

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Websites:

- National Crime Prevention Council — <http://www.weprevent.com>
 Disney's Family Site — <http://www.family.com>
 The Safe Child Home Page — <http://safechild.org>

The Welfare of the City

By Patricia Westerhof

Patricia Westerhof teaches English at John Fraser Secondary School in Mississauga, Ontario. She lives in Toronto with her husband and two daughters.

This past June, one of my students was shot to death in a Burger King parking lot, where she had stopped for a late-night snack with her friends. Sandy had just finished grade 11 and would have celebrated her 17th birthday the next week. She was a lovely person and the type of student that teachers wish for: hard-working, respectful, kind. Nor was she up to any trouble on the night she died — just in a car with her friends, also lovely, wholesome girls. Police still have no motive for the murder, no suspects and few leads, even though there were dozens of witnesses in the parking lot that night.

So many questions

Sandy's death shocked not just the school community but the general public in Ontario and beyond. The story was widely publicized and sensationalized. The news cameras were at the school, in front of the grieving family's house and at the funeral in the family's Egyptian Orthodox church. Teen violence is clearly hot news. Everyone is caught up in asking, How can this happen, and why?

What meaning can there possibly be in Sandy's death? Does it mean that it's not safe to let your kids go out at night, or that they shouldn't go to fast food restaurants? These questions

may seem trivial, but they are part of what the girls who were in the car with Sandy that night still grapple with. In tears, one of them said to me, "We shouldn't have gone — if only we hadn't gone out at all!" I murmured something about it not being their fault, that they had done nothing wrong, but I, too, am baffled in the face of such senseless violence.

I don't want to believe that we have so little control over events. I want to believe that violence happens only to those who go seeking violence, such as the underworld of drug dealers and hardcore junkies, who have little to do with me or my students. Sandy's murder blows apart that rather comforting theory. It tells me that, while some segments of the population are more prone to be perpetrators and victims of violence, no one is immune.

A catching role

I am still struggling to make sense of Sandy's death, as well as other great tragedies that have touched my students' lives. In the last nine years at the large suburban public high school where I work, there have been two suicides, a knifing, and numerous fights. Last year, we had violent graffiti and a bomb threat a few weeks after the Columbine shootings. Add to this list the less dramatic but equally tragic events that affect the school community: students who develop serious illnesses, or whose parents divorce or die. The list of sorrows goes on and on. And, according to statistics and studies on teen violence, similar tragedies happen in high

schools all across North America.

Perhaps I'll never make sense of the tragedies: theologians and philosophers have struggled for centuries with the problem of evil, with little agreement. Maybe a better question to ask is, what is my role as a teacher and as a Christian in the face of teen violence and despair? I think of Sandy's funeral. Hundreds of our students were there, with white faces and soggy tissues. When we came out of the church into the blistering heat of that June afternoon, one of Sandy's close friends started to faint, and I caught her as she crumpled toward the ground. Relieved to have something to do with my grief, I led her to a shady step.

I thought of the role that Holden Caulfield longs for in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*:

"I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye.... And I'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff — I mean if they're running and they don't look where they're going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That's what I'd do all day."

Perhaps my role is to catch students who are falling, literally and metaphorically. This role is a worthy one; I can be a safety net for students who need me. Yet it seems rather passive to stand and wait to be of use.

A useful metaphor

A few months ago, I attended a conference for Christian teachers work-

ing in pluralistic, multicultural settings. During a lively group discussion, a young woman explained that she was just entering the teaching profession and

was thinking a lot about her role as a Christian in a secular school. "I want a metaphor," she said, "to help me understand what I'm getting into. Like, am I Daniel in the lion's den?" We laughed. Then an experienced public school teacher gave a reply that has resonated in me.

He referred us to Jeremiah 29, where God tells the exiled Israelites that their stay in Babylon will be long, so they should build houses, plant gardens, marry, have children. He recited verse 7: "But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." This, he said, is our role in secular schools. Not to be Daniel in a den with hungry beasts, not a catcher in the rye, but a resident who settles in and works toward the well-being of the place, because this is God's will. I like this metaphor because it reminds me that God is Lord of all. His kingdom stretches beyond Jerusalem to Babylon, beyond our Christian institutions to the broader community as well.

The implications of seeing my high school as part of God's kingdom are huge. God's reign implies his pres-

ence. Regardless of how many staff and students profess God's name, his Spirit is at work in the school, drawing people together. When I look at the school with this perspective, the signs of God's presence are everywhere: Teachers volunteer hours to supervise dozens of after-school clubs which become places of belonging for students. Students participate enthusiastically in food drives and fundraising for charity. Well-attended assemblies and programs celebrate students' gifts and accomplishments. Tutoring programs staffed by student volunteers are flourishing. In classrooms, students learn skills and knowledge; they experience insights and even epiphanies. A recent memorial assembly for Sandy reminded students that they are in a caring community where tragedy can draw us closer. As James 1:17 reminds us, "Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights," and there is much that is good in my school.

Agents of hope

Seeing God as present in my school also has implications for my role as a

great good. As we work towards the well-being of the community, we need to deliver the Gospel message. This doesn't need to be done in a preachy way — although I have found that opportunities do arise for sharing one's faith and beliefs — with individuals or even during a class discussion. But I think we can be messengers of hope simply by who we are and what we do in the schools, through building community and continually showing alternatives to violence and despair.

Of course, in order to be messengers of hope, we need the support of the Christian community. I feel very lonely when my church prays occasionally on Sundays for our Christian school teachers and students, with no mention of those of us in the public system. The whole earth is God's; he is building his kingdom in likely and unlikely places. So as I pray for the welfare of my "city," for Sandy's family and friends, and for the victims and perpetrators of violence in my community, I ask you to pray for all the schools in your community and the people working within them.



Patricia Westerhof (seventh from left) with her "Hamlet" class

Christian teacher. Because the Holy Spirit lives within the believing community, those of us who work in secular communities have an important task with a potential for

Was That DISCIPLINE or

Violence?

By Bert Witvoet

While spending a week and a half in Calgary, Alberta, in September last year, I biked to the local library one day and picked up a book entitled *Syrup Pails and Gopher tails: Memories of the One-Room School* by John C. Charyck (Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1983. 143 pp.). I thoroughly enjoyed this "visit" to the early 20th century school scene in rural Alberta. I was somewhat lured by the romantic description of children going to school on horseback or in horse carriages, of the pot-bellied stove, of children entertaining themselves in the field outside the school, of visits to the outhouse in winter time that required taking along a warmed-up portable toilet seat to keep students from bonding their behinds to a frozen surface. Life and education seemed so simple.

At the same time, however, I realized that behind all those romantic images lay a harsh reality. Teachers lived in one-room shacks and got very low wages, if any. Children could get deathly sick riding a horse to school in minus 30 degree weather, and water had to be brought in from a creek or melted from snow in the winter.

And the discipline could be very harsh. Charyck describes a time when children were considered "less fragile." Teachers were allowed to use the strap. A strap, by the way, was often a piece of leather 15 inches in length and two inches wide. Since use of the strap was considered a very personal and intimate ritual, it was administered in private. Sometimes, however, it was administered in front of other students to make an impression.

A judicious and sparing use of the strap does not upset me that much, even though today teachers would lay

themselves open to charges of abuse were they to use it. But some of the following I do find disturbing:

"Besides the strap there were other methods of punishing the offender: detentions; writing out lines; pulling him by the ears or hair; slapping or



striking him; hitting him with any object held or thrown, including rulers, pointers, books, pieces of chalk and blackboard erasers; verbal attacks, including name calling, use of sarcasm, unfavorable personal references, and belittling him."

Now it goes without saying that children in early days were no innocents. In those days, teachers would punish kids for fighting, playing hookey, forging report cards, doing damage to school property, swearing, stealing, unchaste actions or remarks, cheating, smoking, lying, bullying and so on.

Lest we get a very negative picture of schooling and teachers from the past, read the following description of a teacher in Alberta in the early 1930s by a certain Margaret Wood. Before she went to that one-room school, she had heard glowing reports of the teacher:

"Frankly, we didn't believe them. No one could be that good. How mis-

taken we were! The first morning, when she came swinging through the school gate behind George Wood's driver, opened our eyes. It was crazy, but the whole school greeted her and went to help her unhitch the horse. Everyone was talking and laughing at once. I tell you it was exciting.... That school year was so different from any other. We didn't just learn from books, but from anything around us, all the time. She used to say, 'If you feel like singing, humming or whistling, go ahead. Just do it quietly so you won't disturb the others.' If there was a fight, a ring would be formed and the two contestants would battle it out according to rules. Usually both had lost all interest by the time everything was organized, but they still had to spar a bit to save appearances."

According to the author, the school was a happy place and everyone made rapid progress.

It's good to read about specific school situations from the past, I thought, as I sat comfortably ensconced in a library chair. You need things to compare yourselves with. Times have changed. We can't bring back the past, but we can learn from it. Something tells me there was a wholesomeness in those days that had to do with children being allowed to be children for a much longer time than they are today. And maybe that wholesomeness also comes from hardship that built character. As a war veteran friend of mine told me in a local coffeeshop: "It's been too long between wars. People take things for granted."

That's one thing prairie kids in the early part of this century couldn't do very easily.



Violence on Earth

by Ken van Wyk

Ken Van Wyk is the executive director of Christian Counselling Services in Toronto, Ontario.

On Wednesday, December 6, 1989, a young man, 25 years old, product of a violent home, failed military candidate and lover of war films, entered the University of Montreal's School of Engineering building. He was not a student, although he had once been denied admission to the school. He was carrying a .223 caliber semi-automatic rifle. It was a little after 5:00 p.m.

Walking into a classroom, he shouted, "I want the women." He separated the men from the women, ordered approximately 48 men to leave the classroom, and lined the women up along one wall. "You are all feminists!" he yelled and began shooting to kill. According to the professor, all nine women in his class were either killed or wounded.

The young man continued his hunt, stalking his victims without hindrance. He had already murdered one woman near the copying room prior to entering that first classroom. Having killed six more in the classroom, he left to walk through the corridors firing randomly. He then entered the cafeteria shooting three more women, continued into a second classroom, where he murdered four more women before killing himself. By the end of his spree he had murdered 14 women and injured 13 others: nine women and four men. (Gleaned from *Canadian Psychology*, Special Issue: "Violence and Its Aftermath," (Volume 33:2, 128-139, 1992))

ence and Its Aftermath" (Volume 33:2, 128-139, 1992))

Marc Lepine entered history in the shadow of the end of the Cold War, just 25 days after the fall of the Berlin Wall (November 10, 1989). For those of who had lived with the fear of communism, the end of the cold war seemed God-sent, and in its own way it was. But we are beginning to see darkly the chaotic forces that the cold war kept in place. The violence leashed by the cold war is now becoming evident as urban terrorism, a very personal violence. Since the Montreal Massacre, educational institutions, even some grade schools, have seen the same type of attack on a perceived elite group.

In the United States, since July 1992, there have been 14 school shootings in which 44 children have died.

Toward the millennium

What have we learned since the Montreal Massacre? Far from being a random event involving a madman, we now know that we are facing an epidemic. This despite the evidence of a prime indicator of violence, the homicide rate, which has remained relatively constant. Even though the overall homicide rate is largely unchanged, the youth homicide rate in the U.S. has risen by 168 percent. Another complicating factor is the improvement in medical treatment. In Chicago, between the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s, the homicide rate remained relatively constant, while the number of serious assaults increased

by 400 percent. People are now surviving wounds that would have killed them just years ago.

The homicide rate alone does not reflect the overall increase in violence. Nor does it reveal the rate of suicide. Just as there has been an increase in the incidence of youth violence, so the youth suicide rate has jumped by 400 percent since 1950. According to James Gilligan, a Harvard University psychiatrist, acts of violence and self-destruction have a common root: the sense that life is intolerable. How can life be intolerable when we live in a land flowing with milk and honey?

The epidemic of violence

We are not surprised to find reports of violence coming from Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Detroit and Houston. All have large, numerous, inner city "war zone" neighborhoods. But until the 1960s these cities had murder rates lower than the national average, while the predominantly rural Southern states had the highest rates of violence. Like the bubonic plague of medieval Europe, which spread outward from urban centers, homicidal youth violence has moved from America's impoverished inner city neighborhoods to rural and suburban areas. James Garbarino uses that analogy to characterize the outbreak of bizarre, fatal shootings that occurred in schools.

"What typically happens with epidemics is they first take hold in the most vulnerable parts of the population, and then move out to the more general population," says Garbarino,

Bad Will Toward Humankind

a Cornell University professor. "It's quite possible that this surge of school-based shootings in small towns, in rural and suburban areas, is a kind of second stage of epidemic violence among our youth."

The complex factors

That's not to say that everyone is susceptible to catching the disease. Some youth are more at risk than others. Psychologists Robert Zagar and colleagues, in a paper published in 1991, found that a boy's chances of committing murder are twice as high if the following risk factors occur: a family with a history of criminal violence, a history of being abused, membership in a gang, and abuse of alcohol or drugs. The odds triple when, in addition to the aforementioned risk factors, the following also apply: use of a weapon, previous history of arrest, a neurological problem that impairs thinking and feeling, difficulties at school, and a poor attendance record.

The U.S. Department of Education's "Guide to Safe Schools" includes early warning signs that may indicate a child is at risk for committing violent acts. Signs include patterns of bullying, social withdrawal, excessive feelings of isolation, intolerance for differences, or prejudicial attitudes.

According to the public health approach, identification and understanding the factors that place young people at risk is critical. A summary of recent research shows that there are a number of individual and social factors that increase the probability of



violence during adolescence and young adulthood. Some of these factors clustered in four areas include:

INDIVIDUAL: history of early aggression, beliefs supportive of violence, social cognitive deficits;

FAMILY: poor monitoring or supervision of children, exposure to violence, parental drug/alcohol abuse, poor emotional attachment to parents or caregivers;

PEER/SCHOOL: Associate with peers engaged in high-risk or problem behavior, low commitment to school, academic failure;

NEIGHBORHOOD: poverty and diminished economic opportunity, high levels of transience and family disruption, exposure to violence.

The odds increase as the number of risk factors increases. This is a general principle in understanding human development. It is the build-up of risk

factors and experiences that accounts for differences, so it is important to recognize the implications of risk accumulation.

However, these signs should not be used as a checklist formally to identify, label or stereotype children. They are no more adequate for describing these high-risk children than terms like reps, brains, jocks, gothics and gangsters adequately describe the social groupings in schools.

The difficult response

Schools are not equipped to deal with terrorism. Safe-school plans are essential to decrease the likelihood of violence but cannot prevent random acts from occurring.

Educators need to reconnect with students to build a sense of community and security. The tragedy in Littleton, Colorado, has spurred some school officials to increase physical security in hopes of averting a similar disaster. But more importantly, it reminded school officials to listen closely to their students, and, by so doing, they renewed and strengthened efforts to foster a sense of community. Such interaction as "administration by walking around" is the best deterrent against violence, more effective than metal detectors or other sophisticated surveillance devices. Other ways to strengthen school connections include peer mediation programs and techniques for breaking large high schools into smaller, more personal, units.

Whether it be fist fights or lethal attacks, most school violence takes place outside the classrooms - in hall-

ways, cafeterias and other places without direct teacher supervision. Researchers from Michigan and The College of New Jersey noted that many teachers fail to break up student fights in such public places, including bathrooms, locker rooms and school grounds, because they don't consider such "unowned" spaces their domain.

Some of the results, published in the spring issue (1999) of the *American Educational Research Journal*, determined that all 166 reported acts of violence at five high schools in the Midwest occurred in locations with few or no adults present. About 40 percent of the incidents happened in hallways between class periods; another 20 percent took place in cafeterias during lunch.

Teachers are not uncaring but are often hampered by institutional constraints, such as how schools are organized and high student-teacher ratios. The organization of the school has defined the role of a teacher's specialty within the walls of the classroom. This has come to mean that all

other spaces are not their responsibility. Teachers and students can reduce the risk of violence by mapping out possible danger spots and identifying ways to secure them. Elementary schools are at risk, too. Most fights in elementary schools occur on the playground. To make these common areas safer requires teacher intervention and training students to settle disputes peacefully.

A review of risk factors in the literature by Smith, Williams & Rosen, (1990) suggests that the following protective factors may decrease the risk of violence in families:

- A strong social network
- No past history of violence in one's family of origin
- A strong social safety net (finances, education, health, and psychological support)
- Community support
- Use of various coping mechanisms
- No chemical dependencies
- Ability to manage unpredictable stressors

- High levels of family cohesion and adaptability

Further reading:

American Psychological Association, American Academy of Pediatrics. "Raising Children to Resist Violence: What Can You Do?" (1995).

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The medical paradox

On April 29 the *Washington Post* confirmed that Eric Harris, the leader in the Littleton tragedy, was taking the psychiatric drug Luvox at the time of the murders. On April 30 the same newspaper published a story quoting expert claims that Luvox is safe and has no association with incidents of violence. In fact, however, Luvox and closely related drugs commonly induce manic psychoses, aggression, and other behavioral abnormalities in children and young people. Some of the at-risk students are being treated with medication that will have a paradoxical effect.

Luvox is a Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor (SSRI) that is approved for children and youth (up to age 17) for use in the treatment of obsessive compulsive disorder. It is also prescribed for depression, since it is in the same SSRI class as Prozac, Zoloft, and Paxil.

According to the manufacturer, Solvay, four percent of children and youth taking Luvox developed mania

during short-term controlled clinical trials. Mania is a psychosis that can produce bizarre, grandiose, highly elaborated destructive plans, including mass murder. In a recent controlled clinical trial, Prozac produced mania in the same age group at a rate of six percent. These are high rates for drug-induced mania - much higher than those produced in adults. Yet the risk will be even higher during long-term clinical use where medical supervision, as in the case of Harris, is much more lax than in controlled clinical trials. These drugs may also produce irritability, aggression or hostility, alienation, agitation, and loss of empathy.

The phenomenon of drug-induced manic reactions caused by antidepressants is so widely recognized that it is discussed several times in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* of the American Psychiatric Association, and many times in *The Physicians' Desk Reference*.

Readers Response:

Cross-cultural relief work too often paternalistic

I'd like to respond to the article by Dr. Don Oppewal in the *Christian Educators Journal* of February, 1999. Dr. Oppewal reflects well not only the purpose of Worldwide Christian Schools (WCS) but also the commitment to serve and the big hearts of well-meaning North American Christians.

The motivation for overseas mission work comes, undoubtedly, from a burden that we Christians have to obey the Lord. However, this burden sounds strangely like the traditional "White Man's Burden." Let's be honest. None of our motives in any action in life are pure, and our motives to work overseas also include colonialism, paternalism, denominational pride, self-gratification and self-righteousness.

Much of our religious overseas efforts has historically focused on providing human and financial resources. These efforts have inherently been embedded in our Western worldview as we have taught others from our narrow, cultural perspective on how to establish churches, schools, and from our own sense of Christian community. Not only that, we far too often have used the influence of our resources to gain control over the people to whom we send our representatives and resources. We still do this, specifically through organizations like WCS.

Whose solidarity?

Dr. Oppewal writes: "Worldwide organizes teams of students and construction workers to actually build the schools abroad, thus visibly demonstrating Christian solidarity with them, accomplishing what they could never do on their own." Never? And do they even want to? Do they need or want replicas of our own schools? Historically, those with the money determine the need.

I've seen a school in an extremely hot locale built by volunteer WCS workers who not only provided the labor but also the design. The structure had only a few very small windows in each classroom, as the volunteer builder assumed electricity would power the WCS-provided paddle wheel fans in the ceiling and the fluorescent lights. The people who "own" the school, however, cannot pay the electricity bills. As soon as the building was completed, one local leader said to me, "We'll make those windows bigger as soon as he leaves."

Add to these North American efforts the fact that most developing countries have extremely high unemployment rates, and we soon face an ethical question. Nicaragua, for example, experiences unemployment rates somewhere

between 50 to 70 percent. When someone from North America comes to do volunteer work in such a context, that volunteer takes away a job from a person who knows better how to work with the local materials to begin with. Not only that; the plane fare of that North American usually falls into the same range as the annual wages of a local worker.

We must clearly define the purpose of overseas trips for adults and young people alike. If these trips are spiritual retreats, then let's say so. If they are for cross-cultural experiences, then let's call them that. If they are to study the history, ecology and marine life of a particular country, then let's promote them as such. But let's not sanctify trips by identifying them as "missions" (which usually means grandpa's pockets get dipped into a whole lot easier).

Paul Theule, Principal of Calgary Christian High School in Calgary, Alberta

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

The Parallel Worlds of American Film



Stefan Ulstein

all teenagers feel to one degree or another, but few of my white or Asian students had seen it.

Two solitudes

Leaving a screening of the romantic comedy *The Best Man*, I asked a black woman about my age what she thought of the film, which had an all black cast. "I loved it!" she replied enthusiastically. "We all loved it," she continued, taking it upon herself to speak for the predominantly African American audience. "Of course," she sighed, "the critics will hate it."

I asked her why she felt that way. "They always do," she stated with resignation. She wasn't aware that I was reviewing the film for the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, one of two metropolitan dailies. Nor did she know that I liked the film and was planning to rate it very positively. But her comments were deeply insightful. Except that the cast is all black, *The Best Man* is the kind of film that my high school students flock to in droves. It's funny, romantic and topical. When I asked them who had seen it, however, almost nobody had.

The same was true when I saw *Light It Up*, a tense, well-acted drama about an inner-city school, crumbling from neglect, where angry students finally react in anger to a degrading situation. It's a compelling drama that explores why people subjected to daily humiliations and deprivations explode into seemingly mindless and self-destructive behaviors. Again, it deals with high schools students and touches on themes that

Black and white Americans live in parallel worlds. The definition of parallel lines is that the lines will continue on a plane to infinity without diverging or intersecting. Black people have to live with (or around) whites. The news is read mostly by white people. So is the weather. Most television shows and movies are about white people, as are the books studied in school. Most history is really about one ethnic group: whites. But whites can virtually ignore black people, and often they do. Many whites have no curiosity about the lives and thoughts of black people.

In reading Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of an American Slave* we see how early on America formed the basis for two completely separate societies. After the Civil War, the Jim Crow South enforced segregation with lynching. The four thousand documented lynching victims went unmentioned in the mainstream press. One can read the *New York Times* and the major Southern dailies for decades and see virtually no mention of the hangings, burnings and draggings of black men. In the black press, it was front-page news. But the president, the congress and the justices didn't read the black press.

In the fifties, when doo-wop singer Frankie Lyman danced briefly with a white girl on Alan Freed's live dance show, it was immediately can-



celed by enraged network programmers. The parallel lines had bisected. Later, similar shows featured white singers like Elvis and Bill Haley, singing the music that blacks had written. Again, African Americans dropped off the radar screen of the mainstream media. Black people just kept disappearing. A few years ago, Whoopie Goldberg took a recurring role on *Star Trek*, explaining: "We were disappearing. I had to take the role so there would be a black person on television somewhere." Good for Whoopie. But America needs to see African America from the point of view of that culture.

Film as mirror

I try to see every movie with a predominantly black cast because it gives me a chance to catch a glimpse of how that other world thinks. Granted, *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* is not a true portrayal of the lives of most black women. But then again, I don't live a life much like Mel Gibson's in *Lethal Weapon*, or Bruce Willis's in *Die Hard With a Vengeance*. Today I'm going to a preview of the new James Bond flick. His life is nothing like mine, except that we are both rakish, devilishly handsome swashbucklers in the prime of life, and both of us are urbane, witty and debonair. You see my point.

Films present us with an idealized vision of ourselves. Films reflect us back to ourselves. Through films, we see ourselves as we would like to be and as we would like to be seen. Watching macho action adventures won't tell you much about the life of the average middle-aged white guy, but it will tell you about his fantasy life and his deepest aspirations.

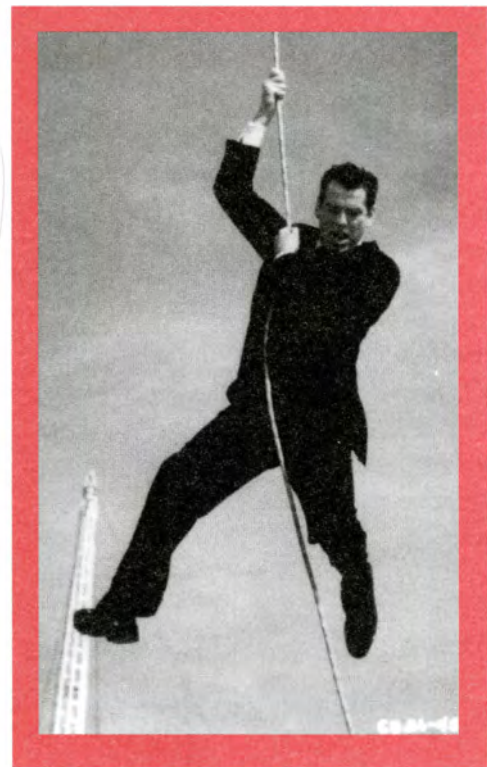
Post-graduate ignorance

At the University of Washington, I enrolled in the first semester of the first Asian American Literature class in the school's history. When Garret Hongo first approached the English department about a class, he was told, "There really isn't a body of Asian American Literature." When Hongo replied that there was, he was told by the white faculty members, "There can't be. How come we don't know about it?" The parallel lines of white and Asian literature had not intersected. The highly educated pro-

fessors were convinced that they had read all the important American literature. It just had not occurred to them that this "American" literature had been chosen exclusively by people of their own ethnic background.

As long as films about African Americans are seen mainly by African Americans, whites and other Americans will miss a window into the lives of their fellow citizens. If African American films, regardless of their production values, continue to draw small audiences, producers will eschew them in favor of more lucrative projects.

Two churches in Alabama recently started an innovative ministry. Realizing that they could live out their lives without ever really knowing one another, they paired up for family dinners. One week the white family would eat at the black family's home. The following week the black family came to the white family's house. The lines were intersecting and everybody was wiser. The kingdom of God was a little nearer at hand.



Author! Author!



by Doris Schuchard

Doris Schuchard has taught at early childhood levels in Christian schools but has since her move to Atlanta, Georgia, concentrated more on writing.

I saw him in the toy shop window. A small, tie-dyed bear sat on a shelf all by himself. It was the most beautiful stuffed bear I had ever seen. I checked the tag — \$70 — and pulled my money from my pocket. A crumpled \$10 bill. Not even close, I thought sadly. I put the bear back and decided on a purple pen instead.

And so begins 11-year-old Julia's tale of a shopping trip and her search for a small colorful bear. It is also her first published story. Writing is not only a tool for learning and achievement, but a gift to share with others. As your students' faith shines through their stories, countless lives may be touched by the words they write. Writing becomes an expression of glory to God, the Author of all creativity. There are many magazines and contests that use children's writing, and having their works printed, with a little effort, can be a blessing for both writer and reader. How can you help your students get their writing published?

The Write Tools

Begin by furnishing a writing environment that will start the creative juices flowing. Set up a quiet area in your room with plenty of pencils, pens, paper, and markers or crayons for illustrations. If possible, provide access to a typewriter or computer.

Magazine pictures and photos are great story starters, and using a dictionary, thesaurus and rhyming dictionary will further hone their skills. Supply examples of quality writing from juvenile books and magazines to help young writers survey the publishing market and set attainable goals.

Research

If you want to avoid the proverbial "writer's block," make sure you give students sufficient time to brainstorm for ideas and gather information. Talk to your students about their interests, after which you can encourage them to make a list of topics and then narrow it down to one. If a child is interested in antique toys, check out books in the library or search the Internet for information. Take a field trip to a toy museum. Interview grandparents about their favorite childhood toys. Taking plenty of notes will give students the confidence needed when it comes time to actually write.

Writing Projects

While the images are still fresh, the best strategy is to take out pencil and paper (or computer!) and start composing. Suggest to the children to write the story just as if they were telling it to a friend, without worrying about spelling or grammar. Below are some ideas for writing projects that may lend themselves to being published.

The Short Story

Every fiction story has a beginning, middle and end.

Beginning: Describe the setting -

where and when does the story take place? Introduce the main characters - why should we like or dislike them? Choose a point of view - who's telling the story?

Middle: How are the characters involved in a conflict? What obstacles do they face and how do they work through the problem? Show, don't tell. Avoid lengthy descriptive passages, for it is action and dialogue that heighten the drama.

End: How do the characters solve their problems? How has the main character grown? What has he learned? How does the story end?

Personal experience article

1. Choose an event in your life. It may be things that happened - a birthday, a move, a frightening storm; it may be things you've done - played sports, cared for a pet, worked at a first job; or it may concern places you've been - a vacation spot, a friend's house, the mall.

2. How did the experience affect you? Show what you went through and dramatize it. Describe your emotions to help your readers feel the way you did. Be able to reveal your experience honestly - the good and the bad.

3. Finally, what truth did you learn that may help others?

Interview

1. Choose a person with an interesting story to tell. It may be a grandparent's memories of the Depression, a classmate's method for finishing homework in 30 minutes, a

Helping Young Writers Publish

pastor who runs marathons for charity.

2. Jot down questions to ask the person. When and where were you born? What were some special events in your childhood? Who or what influenced you to choose your career? What were the biggest problems you've faced, and how did you overcome them? If you could do something differently in your life, what would it be?

3. Set up a convenient time and place for the interview. Will you call the person or meet him? Will you write his answers down or tape them? As you interview, remember to listen. You may hear an exciting story you didn't even ask about. Be respectful of his time and the stories he wishes to share.

4. Decide if you want to recount your subject's entire life history or one specific event. As you write, describe the person's physical characteristics. Include his speaking dialogue. Put the story in chronological order and insert smooth transitions between times and events.

Opinion

Many children's magazines have a page that asks a monthly question or advice on a problem. A personal opinion piece chooses a situation you want to see changed or a cause you want others to join. Ask your students to pick an issue about which they care, such as school uniforms, neighborhood gangs, or their choice for the next president. Using a combination of fact and opinion, persuade your

readers to consider your viewpoint. Involve them emotionally in your cause, yet at the same time teach them to respect other opinions and views.

Poetry

Children who enjoy rhythm, word pictures, and expressing their feelings may prefer the shorter length of poetry writing. There are a few ways to tell your story through poetry:

Alphabet Poem. Choose a word and write it vertically, one letter per line. The first line of the poem begins with the first letter of the word; the next line begins with the second letter, and so on.

Cinquain. A cinquain is a five-line verse that is written as follows:

Line 1: a two-syllable word (subject)

Line 2: four syllables describe subject

Line 3: six syllables showing action

Line 4: eight syllables express a feeling about the subject

Line 5: two syllables describe subject

Quatrains. A quatrain is a four-line poem with one of these rhyme patterns: AABB, ABAB, ABBA, or ABCB. For a longer poem, combine several quatrains, or stanzas, to tell a story.

Editing

You may assist your students with the revision process or give them practice editing each other's writing. Look for both strong and weak aspects as you encourage and support their efforts. Check over these areas:

* Have I included all the necessary information; too much or too little?

* Are all my facts correct?

* Are my facts, dates, etc., consistent throughout the story?

* Do I use clear description and strong action?

* Does my dialogue sound real?

* Have I kept my point of view and verb tense consistent?

* Have I proofread for spelling and grammar?

* Do I have a good ending?

Publishing

Finally, the fun part! Several weeks beforehand, gather guidelines, theme lists, and copies of various magazines and contests that take juvenile submissions (see the sidebars for resources to get you started). Study the markets to find the best place to send your writing:

* Who are the readers of this magazine?

* What types of writing can I submit?

* How long should my piece be?

* Can I send the manuscript or must I submit my idea first?

* Can I submit my manuscript to more than one place simultaneously?

Follow the guidelines for manuscript format and remember to include a self-addressed, stamped envelope and a cover letter. A cover letter may include a short synopsis of the story, what department it is being submitted to, and any credentials of the author.

Whether or not a story becomes published, you can instill a love for writing at an early age.



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

Reluctant Convert



Ron Sjoerdsma

As soon as Bill Hamilton noticed the glow near the front of his classroom that predawn Monday morning, he immediately knew what had been bothering him all weekend long. His last class on Friday had forgotten to shut down the three computers now residing in his classroom, and he had forgotten to check them before he left. For a moment he was bothered by the fact that the custodial staff had not taken care of them or at least called him, but then he remembered that student workers did much of classroom cleaning and had been specifically told not to touch the computers. That had been a serious concern when the centralized lab at Hillendale Christian Middle had been moved out to the classrooms.

Jim Sooterma had shown him how to deactivate the “sleep” mechanism so that he could always tell when the computers were turned on. Jim had first tried to convince him that it would be OK to leave them in the sleep mode overnight, but that seemed wasteful to Bill — he even disliked the fact that his new television drew electricity when it wasn’t on — so Jim had suggested that he let the screens indicate when the computers were on or off.

Faint recall

Bill flicked on the classroom lights, moved over to his desk, opened his sketchy plan book, and tried to remember the events of the previous Friday. He wasn’t sure if Friday’s last hour class had actually used the computers, so he would not be able to blame anyone but himself. He first decided that the last students to use the computers must have been in his fifth-hour class, but he couldn’t tell for certain from his plan book whether fifth-hour had met last Friday as part of the rotating block schedule. Yes, he concluded, fifth-hour had met, and Bill thought he remembered a few of his students finishing their homework early and moving over to the computer corner.

Bill went to the corner and selected “shutdown” on each computer. Each screen held the message that the computer had been disconnected from the server, some-

thing Bill didn’t fully understand but figured it was a good thing not to be connected to the server for the weekend. One of the screens held the familiar “Five 2 Eight” icon from an Internet site that Bill occasionally consulted for middle-school-graphing calculator ideas. He wondered whether he could have been the last one to use this computer.

He restarted one unit, reconnected to the server, and selected the Netscape icon to his Internet browser. Perhaps he’d have to reactivate the sleep function. He might even tell Jim about it. Maybe he could take a step toward healing what had been, for the past several years, a pretty contentious relationship with his colleague.

Luddite image

Bill remembered with a little guilt how he had resisted Hillendale’s computer decentralization for reasons he had never expressed and would have had difficulty articulating even to himself. Bill had rarely used the computer lab, particularly once he had received his graphing calculators two years ago. Perhaps he just resisted because he always resisted — he had to keep up his anti-technology image. But when it came to distributing the computers, Bill had asked for three. Some teachers had received four — Kate Wells clearly needed more for all the writing her students did — and he was thankful that no one had challenged his request. Bill had done the math, and three was simply his fair share. He felt a little guilty for a few weeks, but soon found them useful clustered in a technology center located near the front of the room so he could keep an eye on them.

The center made an excellent enrichment space for his more advanced students, and he quickly discovered a graphing calculator program already loaded on each computer that had more advanced functions than their TI73s — or had one of his students discovered the software? Bill couldn’t remember, but he did know that Jesse Cross had found an amazing array of graphing activities on the Internet. It wasn’t long before one of Jesse’s friends had suggested that maybe they could get extra credit for doing some of the problems on a math web site. Then Megan Leighton had found what had become a turning point

for Bill: Texas Instruments's "Five 2 Eight: Activities and Resources for Middle Grades" (www.ti.com/calc/docs/five2eight.htm).

Bill had to admit that he was becoming an Internet junky when it came to math activities. Now, as the newly started web browser moved to the Hillendale homepage, he quickly selected his favorite site for beginning his day; in fact, he had to acknowledge it was the reason he came in early every morning. Mathpuzzle.com had him hooked from the moment he had solved his first "chaos tile" problem. Bill also routinely copied the daily crossword puzzle linked to mathpuzzle.com and often worked on it late in the evening. He and his wife had done crosswords together. If she were still alive, she would have objected to how much time he was wasting on math games, but she liked crosswords.

Web devotions

For some reason, the thought of his wife reminded him that he hadn't prepared his morning devotions for his homeroom — a turning point he could never allow — that routine might slip away too easily, he thought. But that was never really in danger of happening now that the web had become a resource for devotions as well. Kate Wells had mentioned in an 8th-grade team meeting that she was using an online resource for her homeroom devotions. And while Bill Hamilton would never be accused of being hip, his students thought he had definitely taken a turn in that direction the first time he fed the daily devotional from "Live the Life Online" (www.livethelife.org/) into the LCD projector that normally showed algebraic graphs. Bill sometimes had to modify "Devos & Gutsy Acts" but generally found the content age-appropriate — not too radical for him or for his perception of the Hillendale Christian community.

As he selected the website's bookmark, Bill had no trouble remembering that they had been studying the Beatitudes. Today the focus was mercy and justice, something every 13-year-old could think about and practice more. He had seen a vast improvement in the way his (and he hoped his student's) school day began when he asked all of them to quiet themselves and get alone with God. It still seemed a little odd to Bill that his students

responded better to this "quiet yourself" notion on the electronic devotional than they would have if he had asked them. He even encouraged them to get their Bibles from their desks and sit wherever they felt comfortable. He took attendance once devotions were finished — a radical notion just a year ago. The peace and spirituality that descended on his room was creating the first genuine wonder for Bill in all of his 36 years of teaching adolescents.

Bill Hamilton, teacher of mathematics, lover of the orderly, original Hillendale curmudgeon, sat waiting for his students, wondering if, for the first time in his life, he was genuinely turning his heart toward the children.



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Set Free: Christian Schools As

by John Hiemstra

John Hiemstra is associate professor of political studies at the King's University College in Edmonton, Alberta.

The Scriptures have a lot to say about freedom. So does our society. If there is anything that characterizes the end of the 20th century, it is the desire to be set free from restraints — moral, economic, political and social. So you would think that Scripture and society are in sync. Not so, according to John Hiemstra, who allowed us to excerpt part of his keynote address given at the 1999 Christian Educator's Association Convention held in Edmonton, Alberta.

According to the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 3, "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom". A little earlier, Paul said Corinthian Christians were letters of recommendation for the gospel because the Spirit of freedom was written on their hearts. I would like to combine those two themes as I challenge Christians schools to be set free and to be letters of recommendation to a world that is enslaved in spite of its insistence on freedom.

What does 2 Corinthians 3 mean for Christian teachers called to shape the culture-shapers of tomorrow? To answer this question, we need to discern both the holy and the unholy spirits that are directing and shaping the culture in which our students participate.

Let's look at three recent news stories from the province of British Co-

lumbia that can help us interpret the meaning of freedom in our society. The first story concerns morality, the second is about economics, and the third involves plurality.

Child pornography

Earlier this year (Jan. 13, 1999), the British Columbia Supreme Court ruled that Robin Sharpe's "freedom of expression" was violated by the Criminal Code provision that prohibits the possession of child pornography.

So, what's the story? If you asked Mr. Sharpe, he might say something like this: I am a 65-year-old man, I have pedophilic inclinations and I enjoy child pornography. The police searched my apartment and seized my collection of pornographic books, manuscripts, stories and photographs. Some of these included photographs of "nude boys displaying their genitals or anal regions." I don't think there is anything wrong with simply possessing this child pornography. Nobody is "hurt" when I sit in my apartment and read a pornographic magazine. How can anyone be harmed, just because I have child pornography in my room? In fact, I think the law [Criminal Code s. 163.1 (4)] prohibiting the possession of child porn violates my "freedom of expression." The Charter of Rights and Freedoms [s. 2 (b)] guarantees all Canadians the freedom to read what they want in the privacy of their own homes. Do you want the Gestapo marching into your home and telling you what to read?

When the media later asked Mr. Sharpe if he thought he should be free to have sex with children, he replied: "It depends on if there is consent." Mr. Sharpe's honest admission pushes the outer limits of freedom. Is our society so obsessed with freedom that the only limit on freedom it will accept is the freedom of another person to say "no," or withhold consent, as Mr. Sharpe puts it.

This case demonstrates a key feature of our times: freedom is being expanded at the expense of God's truth and creation order. In fact, basic questions do not appear to have arisen in the court case. For example, is human freedom limited by the nature of sexuality and the question of what is healthy and unhealthy sex? Are there givens for healthy and unhealthy child development? We know that, in reality, children who participate freely in pornography and child-sex — activities that are anti-normative and anti-creational — will likely mature into adults who have great difficulty freely choosing healthy sexuality.

Chinese economic migrants

Our second news story concerns desperate economic migrants clinging to barely-seaworthy ships. Who among us was not disturbed by the television images of Chinese migrants landing on the coast of British Columbia this summer?

The *Edmonton Journal* notes that Chinatown in New York City is now home to about 250,000 illegal Chinese migrants, most of whom arrived

Letters of Recommendation to an Enslaved World

in the last 10 years. The columnist writes: "You won't stop them ... and the reason is ... that they're going to go to where the money is. And the money is [in New York]."

The reaction that welled up inside many of us goes something like this: We need to stop this flow of illegal migrants. They are jumping the immigration queue! This is unjust.

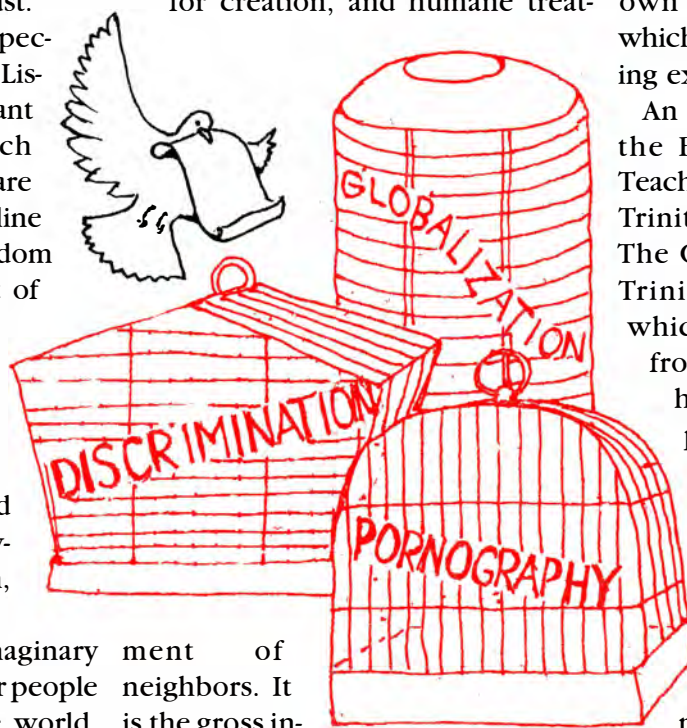
But what might be the perspective of the Chinese migrants? Listen to this hypothetical migrant speak: The West and the rich elites in many poor countries are hypocrites. They talk a nice line about globalization and freedom today — the free movement of goods and services across borders, the free flow of information, the free movement of capital and technology, and the free movement of professionals, experts and technicians across borders. Everything is freedom, freedom, freedom.

But do you notice, the imaginary migrant asks, that we, the poor people and low-paid laborers of the world, are not free to move across borders? Back in my home province of Fujian, China, the elites set up a free trade zone that eliminates all barriers to global trade. Now, we factory workers produce goods, like Nike running shoes, for only pennies per hour. We live in utter poverty. The environment at home is spoiled. We are trapped and our kids have no future.

So we are joining the rush to global freedom — even at the risk of being

sent home or brutalized by criminal gangs and "snakeheads."

This is another story of how freedom is worshipped in our culture and how God's truth and creation are ignored. In order to maximize freedom and material prosperity, our current vision of globalization sets aside God's demand for just pay, stewardly care for creation, and humane treat-



ment of neighbors. It is the gross injustice of our globalizing international economic order that compels people to migrate in order to live out their God-given humanity.

Trinity Western

Our final story relates to living the Christian life in today's plural society. It concerns your vocation as Christian teachers and how a Christian teacher education program is

now under fire.

Trinity Western is a Christian university in British Columbia that operates a teacher education program. Currently, Trinity students complete a final year through the secular teacher's program at Simon Fraser University. In order to fulfil its Christian mission, Trinity developed its own final year for their students, which includes students gaining teaching experience in the classroom.

An agency created by government, the British Columbia College of Teachers (BCCT), refused to approve Trinity's education program. Why? The College of Teachers argues that Trinity's "community standards," which require students to refrain from "premarital sex, adultery, and homosexual behavior," might produce teachers that will behave in ways harmful to school children. Without a government mandate to do so and without evidence of any discrimination or harmful practices, the B.C. College of Teachers rejected Trinity's application.

Trinity appealed this decision in Court. Although the B.C. College of Teachers lost the initial round in Court, as well as the appeal, it still refuses to approve the application and is applying for leave to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada. If the Supreme Court overturns the 2-1 decision by the British Columbia Court of Appeal, the simple belief that homosexual behavior is morally wrong will be grounds to deny Trinity the

freedom to grant education degrees.

What is happening here? Our society's pursuit of greater "freedom for all" ends up decreasing religious freedom for Trinity, and, potentially, for all Christian schools and organizations.

. . . .

These stories give us an indication of our times, the era in which God is calling you and me to teach. This is the world our children are inheriting, the world in which you are being asked to guide them to freedom and wisdom. This is the society in which we should educate our students to become letters of recommendation.

But what does it mean to be a "letter of recommendation" from the Spirit, who sets us free in our Y2K world?

Need for repentance

In his book *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, Henri Nouwen argues that the younger son in this parable asks his father for his inheritance so that he can dispose of it, use it up. In that culture, Nouwen says, this is the same as saying "I wish you were dead!" One way of interpreting this parable is to see our entire culture as the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). It wishes God dead and lives as if he is.

While modernism and postmodernism have given us many good things, we are also wishing God dead. Environmental damage mounts, cultural genocide pops up in every corner of the globe, racial cleansing haunts us, our technological paradise has collapsed into sameness and imprisonment. We are left feeling numb.

But, like the younger son feeding the pigs, our society can come to its senses. Wonder of wonders, Jesus tells us in this parable, God is waiting with open arms. We wish him dead, but he wishes us alive!

This is the depth of God's love and compassion. We need compassion to make our Christian schools serve as a

"living letter" to our numb world that is waiting expectantly for liberation (Romans 8:18-21).

I'm afraid, however, that Christian organizations are often inclined to the elder son's attitude. We don't believe that God's grace really includes our rebellious and hurting world. We forget that the division between the holy and unholy spirits of our time also cuts through our hearts, and we often end up cooperating with the spirits of our modern times. For this, we need to learn to repent.

God's love letter to all creation.

A second starting point for life in a postmodern world is to reaffirm the Creator as the center of creation. God is alive and well and deeply loves his creation (John 3:16,17). This is not merely a theological doctrine. John Calvin believed it so important that he started his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* with it: If we humans truly want to know ourselves we must know God, Calvin says, and if we want truly to know God we must know ourselves.

Modernity went wrong precisely because it thought it could know itself, and set itself free without God. The liberating core of the Gospel, however, is that God wants a personal and covenantal relationship with you, and, moreover, with all of creation!

But do our textbooks and curriculum feature God as the center of life? I recently heard of a textbook which portrayed Thanksgiving Day as a celebration started by American Pilgrims to thank the native peoples for saving them. Consider another example: what impact do government exams have on our children when they suddenly notice that these exams — which their parents and schools openly emphasize and praise — exclude every bit of Christian perspective that you worked so hard to teach?

A letter written over time

One by-product of modernism, ac-

cording to Calvin Seerveld of the Institute of Christian Studies in Toronto, is "cultural amnesia." People forget who they are and where they came from. North American Christians have also forgotten their own history. For example, did you know that the majority of Christian schools in North America, Protestant as well as Catholic, were explicitly started as Christian alternatives to modernism?

Some of you might vaguely know Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) as a theologian of the by-gone 19th century. But did you know he was a contemporary of Nietzsche and developed a profound Christian alternative to modernist culture that made selective, sanctified use of some of its fruits?

As an alternative to the spirit of modernity, Kuyper coined the well-known sentence: "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of human life, of which the Christ, the Sovereign of all, does not call out: 'Mine!'" He argued that Christian schools and teachers are important leaders for working out the Lordship of Christ in our culture. Teachers guide students to become wise culture-reclaimers and culture-shapers by sorting through the good and bad contributions of modernity.

As Christian teachers we need to help the Church regain its collective memory, reclaim its history and rekindle its biblical traditions. The Holy Spirit did not start writing his "living letter of recommendation" to the world yesterday. He's been writing on the hearts and lives of believers throughout the ages.

As a first step in recovering our history, perhaps teachers should dedicate one PD day per year to the study of a good book, like Kuyper's *The Problem of Poverty*, Paul Marshall's new book *Heaven Is Not My Home: Learning to Live in God's Creation*, a good biography of St. Augustine, the Church Father who lived during the collapse of the Roman Empire, a time quite similar to ours. Or, perhaps, read a

good history of your country that explains how North Americans have adopted a modernist self-image to replace the vision of their forebears, as flawed as that particular Christian vision was.

A transformational letter

A fourth characteristic of Christian Schools as a "living letter" is that they must be transformational. Redemption is not added onto creation, nor does it save us out of creation; rather, redemption restores and transforms creation.

But how do we know how to participate in God's renewal of creation in our postmodern times—as communities and Christian schools?

* One option is not to try at all. Some Christians see our culture as being so permeated by modernism that they seek freedom by fleeing the world. Christian schools then become havens for Christian pilgrims and sojourners, not training grounds for transformers.

* The extreme converse option is to accommodate to the secular world. Some conservative Christians do so by hanging onto older versions of rational modernism, while some liberal Christians accommodate by adopting new postmodern fads. But accommodation in any form never leads to genuine renewal of creaturely life.

* Biblicism is another option. It suggests that the entire blueprint for an alternative Christian culture to modernity is spelled out in the Bible. Christians using this approach often have difficulty with those elements of culture not directly addressed in Scripture and with biblical commands that no longer are directly relevant, for example, laws of clean and unclean.

* Another option is moralistic legalism. Some Christians try to renew our culture by reducing the Bible to long lists of moral dos and don'ts. Christian schools often use this approach for student behavior. The recent rush by Christian schools to adopt "Codes of Conduct" for teachers is another example.

* A final option is doctrinalism. Here Christian schools reduce the Bible to rational propositions and hope that by "knowing" these, students will be able to live Christianly in this secular world.

Each of these options has an element of merit, but they all suffer from serious shortcomings. I have become convinced that the transformation of culture must involve biblical discernment of the structures of creation in our historical context. If we think of the Bible with the metaphor of "a lamp unto our feet" (Psalm 119), then the Bible, like a flashlight in the night, illuminates our life's walk in creation. The Bible helps fallen and limited humanity discern the structures of creation.

In this way, the Bible is a liberating book. It relieves us of the modernist duty to construct the world and instead opens up our vision and understanding of the normative structures of reality. The Bible is indispensable because it helps liberate us within God's good creation and enriches our lives. In the same way, Christian education enriches and deepens our students' experience by helping them see what is out there. This prepares students to live a principled life in this modern world.

Some years ago, as I strolled across the University of Toronto campus, I happened upon the fine old Victoria College building, vintage 1836, with the inscription: "The truth shall set you free." Postmodernism has had its effects on all North American universities so that today many professors claim there is no truth. An obvious conclusion is, therefore, that we cannot be set free.

We know otherwise! The Spirit of Christ has been written on our lives as educators, and on the lives of our students, and on the lives of the entire church, making it clear for everyone to read that "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."

Dordt Press

new release

Physical Education, Sports and Wellness:

Looking to God as We Look at Ourselves

John Byl & Tom Visser, editors

paper, 336 pgs., \$19.95 U.S.

A collection of papers from the annual Conferences on Christianity, Sport, Leisure, and Wellness, 1994-1998. Contains five sections: 1) Your Body: Good and Beautiful; 2) Your Body: Glorifying God and Enjoying Him Forever; 3) Teaching Physical Education; 4) Learning Through Sport; and 5) Historically Rooted Perspectives. A companion to *Christianity and Leisure: Issues in a Pluralistic Society* (Dordt Press, 1994).

teacher's aids

Sound Stewardship: How Shall Christians Think About Music?

by Karen De Mol

1999, paper, 52 pages, \$3.25 U.S.

Articulates a Christian perspective on music based on the realities of creation, fall, redemption, and eschaton. The author, professor of music at Dordt College, also considers several difficult issues, such as what makes music Christian, how music carries meaning, and how we judge music. Originally published as an article in *Pro Rege*.

Letters to Lisa

by John Van Dyk

1997, paper, 217 pgs., \$11.95 U.S.

An engaging series of letters explores what it means to be a Christian teacher. Addresses practical questions, from meeting individual needs to competition, curriculum, and professionalism.

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Nancy Knol

Who Is Worthy?

Nancy Knol has agreed to coordinate this important column dealing with middle-school,

early-teen issues. Nancy teaches English and religion at Grand Rapids Christian High. She has spent the bulk of her teaching career teaching middle school and is co-author of the book Reaching and Teaching Young Adolescents.

That week always feels like a blur once it's over. Play try-out week is incredibly fast-paced, stressful, and exhausting. A sea of faces enters my room each noon hour, all week, and somehow I must create order so that each face can become a name, and each voice may be heard. I try to be as fair as possible. I tell myself that I am looking for skill and trustworthiness and enthusiasm and potential, and that I have to keep my personal feelings out of it. I remind myself of the "middle school philosophy" — the rules are so much less cut and dried than they are in high school. Many human revelations get in the way of making clear-cut decisions.

First, there is Marie. Marie made the play last year, and it was a glorious experience for her. Marie comes from a very dysfunctional home, and middle school is a traumatic time for her. She is over-attentive to boys and, quite frankly, extremely self-absorbed. At the same time, she is pathetically insecure. Two days before she tried out, she brought me a small gift. It was a small framed quote from the previous year's play script. Middle school students are rarely subtle. So what is she trying to say with this token — "Remember how good I was?" "You now owe me a part?" "Help! I need this to survive this year?" It felt like an 11th-hour bribe, and, though I accepted it with thanks, inside I was a bit irritated and put off. But I must put aside this feeling and not let this gesture slant my choosing either way. Ironically, it would, of course, more likely work against her if it did color my decision.

Then there's Jeff and Laura and Sara and Rob. All shy, retiring, lonely, soft-spoken people. Incredibly poor performers. Unable to project, to conjure up any animation in face or voice. So this should be easy. Based on the cold calculations of skill, they are easily dismissed. But the

risk! What a bold and beautiful step they take in stepping into my room that day! How can I honor

that and at the same time maintain the integrity of a good production?

And then comes that magical moment that every director hopes for. Two students put together who make it happen. Reciting a part is smoothly laid aside after just a moment or two, and the two characters emerge as real people before us all, and we all are caught, spellbound, in this moment of truth.

Except that Jim, who is reading one of the parts, is such a discipline problem. He has already received five zero letters and was put on social probation for mooning the school bus. So I know I will get opposition from other teachers for putting him in this production. And I know it is a risk to give him the part, asking him to memorize faithfully and show up for all the practices. He isn't really responsible enough. He isn't really worthy.

All this sets me to thinking beyond middle school, behind the not-so-important decision-making that is about to occur this weekend, to a much grander moment of truth.

When I come before my God, what do I bring with me? Do I come, like Marie, with a bargain in mind: You do this, and I'll give You this in return? Do I come trembling and full of hopeful fear, like Jeff and the others? Or do I stride in like Jim did that week, ready to "give it a whirl" because it's so important to me, even though, deep down, I know that I am being presumptuous to think that God would see beyond my sins to give me a taste of grace?

For all of us who are in a position like this, whether it is choosing a play cast or deciding who does or does not make the basketball team, it feels a bit like playing God.

Who is worthy? That week I felt deeply my own inadequacies in balancing that remarkable scale called Love and Law. It is not as neat and tidy as it looks; and although Love finds a way of making the most flawed of us a thing of beauty, it is only perfect, holy Love that ever really does it right.

Query



Tena Siebenga Valstar

Tena Siebenga-Valstar, a former teacher and principal, is working towards a Ph.D. at the University of Alberta. She and her preacher husband live in Fort McMurray, Alberta. Those who wish to submit a question to her can find her address on the back page.

Third-grade kid, first-rate roamer

Question #1

I am running out of ideas for one of my third-grade students. He is constantly out of his desk, likes to talk and roam about the classroom. He doesn't sit down to do his work. He is very quick; in no time he's across the room. His work is often not completed. He is, however, a good reader. I have tried both punishment (e.g. having him complete work in another classroom while his class has art or physical education) and rewards.

Response:

I trust you have already been working with his parents to learn as much as possible about his medical/academic history, and talked with his previous teachers to learn what encourages or hinders learning. Constant communication with parents is essential. Remember, we are in this together.

What a blessing that this little boy is a good reader. How did he learn to read? Maybe you can use some of the same strategies. Observe how he learns. If it is not by pencil and paper he may be an auditory learner.

Can he tell you why he can't sit still? Could you ask an aide or a practicum student to observe him? What prompts him to get out of his desk? How long can he stay on task? What makes him go to the next thing? Do you have available the resources of a consultant?

Does he have gaps in his learning and, therefore, feels defeated before he starts? Does he feel he cannot write even though he can read? Ask a former teacher who loves children to volunteer at least an hour twice a week to instruct the child one-on-one. Ask her to devise a success-oriented program.

Give the child purpose for his movement. Appoint him as your errand boy bringing messages to the office or another teacher. If he becomes overly active, have him

run five laps around the gym while another teacher is conducting a class. He may return more able to settle down.

You indicate that you have tried rewards and punishment. I have frequently heard of physical education class taken away as a punishment. A child who consistently "misbehaves" is often the one who needs the physical activity the most. In a situation like this we sometimes have to ask, "Whom are we punishing the most — the child or the teacher?"

At the end of the day think of the good things that happened, thanking God that you have been able to meet some of his needs. Pray that God will give you wisdom and patience and above all help you see this child as special. He is made in God's image and is using the gifts and talents God has given him.

Hyperactive or learning disabled?

Question # 2

I know that I have children in my classroom who have difficulty learning. When do I consider them hyperactive or learning disabled? What can be done for them?

Response:

It is estimated that 11 percent of school age males and three percent of females of the same age are affected by Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD), which is the official name the American Psychiatry Association has given to the disorder commonly called ADD or ADHD. A child may have AD/HD if she or he exhibits many of the following behaviors:

- has difficulty sustaining attention to tasks
- often fails to give close attention to details
- often runs or climbs excessively
- does not seem to listen when spoken to directly
- often fails to follow instructions
- has difficulty awaiting his/her turn
- often appears restless and fidgety
- often loses or forgets important things
- blurts out answers before hearing the question.

Some researchers believe that AD/HD results, in part, from problems related to the genes that encode receptors



and transmitters of dopamine, a chemical that acts as a neuro transmitter, conveying messages from one brain cell to another. Secreted by neurons in certain parts of the brain, dopamine is capable of inhibiting or modulating the action of other neurons, in particular those involved in emotion or movement. Although the cause of AD/HD is not fully understood, research has shown that it is not caused by poor parenting, family problems, poor teachers, too much TV, food allergies, excessive sugar consumption, minor head injuries, or slight damage to the brain.

A team of researchers at the University of Alberta have a high rate of success working with individuals with AD/HD through a neurofeedback-based program. The neurofeedback training program developed by Leps and Lemoine is based on research showing that individuals with AD/HD exhibit characteristic brain wave patterns when facing a task requiring concentration. Their brains produce a much higher proportion of theta waves — the brain waves associated with first level sleep — than do those not affected by AD/HD.

While it may be hard to see anything “sleepy” about a child with AD/HD, who bounces from one distraction to another, Leps uses the analogy of what a person does who feels drowsy when driving. One turns on the radio, opens the window; anything to stimulate. The brain of a person with AD/HD seeks stimulation wherever it can be found.

The training program teaches individuals how to change their brain functions. They can recall this internal skill; it is not an externally imposed change. This training, involving 40 one-hour training sessions, is rather costly and requires screening of candidates to determine potential benefit. One of the students from our school was involved in the program in the initial stages of development and experienced success through the program.

A number of drugs are used effectively to control AD/HD symptoms. Most are psychostimulants, Ritalin being one of the most heavily prescribed. Although effective, one may have to deal with side effects or rebound effects when the medication wears off. Whether or not one chooses to use the drugs is a personal matter. I have worked with students for whom it has been effective, and

with others whom the parents found the side effects something with which they did not wish to contend.

Piercing the male teacher's ear

Question #3

I, a male middle school teacher, have wanted to wear an earring in one ear for sometime, so finally at the beginning of the summer I had my ear pierced. Now as school is about to begin, I am a bit apprehensive. What do you suggest I do?

Response:

First of all, I believe you have to honestly examine why you did it. Your actions not only affect you but also those around you — your students, their parents, other staff members and the reputation of the school. In each case it could have a positive or negative impact.

Your question led to a search of the Scriptures.

In Ex. 21:6 we read of piercing an ear with an awl as a sign whereby a servant pledged lifelong service to his beloved master. Other Old Testament references are to earrings obtained by God's covenant people from pagans. God instructed Jacob (Gen. 35:2) to get rid of the foreign gods, to purify themselves and change their clothes. Jacob then buried all the foreign gods and rings in their ears (vs. 4). This appears to be part of the purification process — ridding themselves of that associated with pagans. Ex. 32:2 makes reference to Aaron requesting earrings worn by women, sons and daughters. These are believed to be part of the plunder brought from Egypt. Num. 31:50 also refers to earrings previously worn by heathen men and acquired by the Israelites in battle.

In the New Testament (I Peter 3:3) women are cautioned that their beauty should not come from outward adornment, but from the inner self; the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit which is of great worth in God's sight. Romans 14 encourages us to “make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification” as it makes reference to those who may be weak in the faith. This Scripture serves as an anchor for us who are considered leaders in our schools.

Mike's Moment of Truth

by Ruth Vander Zee

Ruth Vander Zee teaches middle

school at Timothy Christian in Elmhurst, Illinois. She has written Discover Your Gifts and Learn How to Use Them for Youth and is a children's book author.

If given the choice, Mike would sit in the front right-hand corner of the room so that if he angled his body just so, he could keep his eye on everything that happened in the room.

On a Monday in April, Mike entered the seventh-grade English lit. class early. As he was hurrying to claim his seat, I asked him if he would read from pages 145 and 146 when class started. He quickly glanced at the pages, I assumed to check if there were any hard words. Mike would not want to be embarrassed by stumbling across unfamiliar words.

He was reading confidently when he came to the middle of page 146 and read, "Ah, stop lying, T. J." Cassie said testily...."

Suddenly, boys' glances darted from one to another. A few made small coughing noises behind cupped fists. They all knew what was funny and in a few seconds had communicated this to each other. All except Mike. There he stood at the front of the room for all to see, and he didn't have a clue. His eyes darted around the room and, picking up the cue, he began to giggle along with the rest.

I knew immediately what had happened. Mike had read the word "testily." I stopped the reading, took my glasses off, scanned the room, and said, "Now kids, the word Mike just read is not "testicle" or "testes," it's "testily." It means that the character was irritated. Coughs and giggles stopped. In class, that is.

The chatter and the laughs continued in the huddles at the lockers after class and as the boys changed for P.E. fourth hour.

Several weeks passed. It was May and the students of seventh-grade lit. class were writing poetry. All were busy with their thoughts, attempting to put them on paper. All, that is, except Mike. He sat in his desk, his left arm dangling over the back of the chair and his long gangly

legs stretched far in front of him. He held his pencil in his right hand, tap-

ping the eraser on the desk. Occasionally he'd write a few words on paper, but to my observations Mike's far-away look said that his thoughts were not on poetry.

Twenty minutes into the period, he obviously made a decision. It probably wasn't easy, but he did it. He walked the distance from his front, right-hand-corner- of-the-room seat to my desk. He leaned on the desk with his right hand and looked out into the room, scratching his head. Mike really never looked at anyone in particular when he talked, certainly not into the eyes of an adult. After several moments, he blurted out, "Can I ask you a question? ... It's about my body."

Hearing this, I said, "Mike, maybe you'd better pull up a chair and face me so that the whole class doesn't hear our conversation." I glanced around the room to check if anyone had put him up to this, but everyone was busy. No one was paying any attention to Mike.

He sat down. Wringing his hands between his knees, he stuttered, "Uh ... what are testes?"

Recalling the "testily" incident a few weeks earlier, I realized that this was probably the most sincerely honest and mulled-over question I had heard all year. This seventh-grade kid sitting in front of me, actually looking at me, had never been more serious. "Well, Mike, you know you have a penis, right?"

He looked down at his crotch in alarm, then looked up and squeaked, "Yes."

"Well, right behind your penis are your testes."

Understanding and relief washed his face. He seemed not embarrassed, but empowered. He said, "Uh, OK." And with that simple bit of information Mike got up, and with a slight swagger walked back to his desk.

Just as he got back to his front, right-hand-corner perch, the bell rang. With a confidence he hadn't displayed earlier, Mike gathered his books, walked out of the room to be one of the first to huddle at the lockers and talk loudly with the guys.

Truth certainly is freeing, I thought, as I watched him go.



Steven VanDerWeele

What's Happened to Our High Schools?

Martin Morse Wooster, *Angry Classrooms, Vacant Minds: What's Happened to Our High Schools?* 1994. San Francisco: Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy. 175 pages plus 10-page supplement of annotated bibliography.

Reviewed by Steve J. VanDer Weele, emeritus professor of English, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The value of *Angry Classrooms, Vacant Minds* lies in the historical research which underlies the discourse of each of the seven chapters. Though the problems the author and his assistants address are primarily public school problems, the discussion inevitably spills over into the arena of private schools as well, for these schools provide an important part of the context for some of the issues. In fact, two combustible topics have dogged educational debate throughout our history: race and religion.

The first chapter, "A Short History of American Education," reminds one of the turbulent history of education in America — from the process by which public and private schools became separate institutions to the debate about vocational and more academic education; from debates about how government school boards should be determined to the rise of Progressive Education; from the abrupt change in educational thinking after the launch of Sputnik in 1957 (it pretty much ended progressive education in American schools) to the move to consolidate school districts and school boards.

Uprooted values

"Teaching Values in Schools" (Chapter 2) traces the stages by which education became morally neutral. Before, say, the 1960s, the teachers embodied the traditional virtues; they were regarded as "wise, skilled, reverend elders" who could assume, for the most part, a Protestant reading of moral principles. The last several decades have seen a number of (for the most part) failed experiments: values clarification, emphasis on self-esteem, a turning away from the discipline without which learning can take place.

We now have, generally speaking, values cut off from their religious and philosophical basis — cut-flower values. And, as Robert Coles points out, nothing has come along to replace the loss of religion in education. One solution the author recommends appears in his introduction, but it is a meaningful one — the exposure of the students to great works of literature for their moral education.

Although the author's tone is quite objective and balanced, as the presentation of his research requires, his sympathies are not hard to discern. Thus, a regret lurks between the lines as he continues his documentation of educational change.

Debate on vouchers

"School Choice," the subject of Chapter 7, receives thorough treatment. Wooster traces how the debate has shifted from choice between private and public schools to choice among public schools. Vouchers enter the picture to complicate the problems in this area, and racism looms over the arguments like a ghoul that will not go away.

John Chubb and Terry Moe say in their book that "[Choice] has the capacity all by itself to bring about the transformation that, for years, reformers have been seeking for years to engineer in myriad other ways." (171) But Wooster takes issue with these authors: "...school choice will not convince parents that education is worthwhile, tell students to do their homework, teach right and wrong, dissolve all red tape, or even ensure that students are as educated as their parents or grandparents." Such improvements as can be made are more likely to be incremental and gradual than dramatic.

A word about the title. It requires a bold inferential leap from the text to the harsh implications of "Angry Classrooms, Vacant Minds." The tone of the book is dispassionate, and we learn only seldom what actually happens in the classroom. So we have no choice but to regard the title, despite Wooster's sober recital of data and careful analysis, as a searing indictment of the state of education in our land.

A Noble Profession



Sarah L. Levine, editor,
A Passion for Teaching.
1999. Alexandria, Va.:

Association for Supervision and Curriculum
Development. Scott McVay collaborator, Kit
Frost Photographer. 209 pages.

Reviewed by Steve J. Van Der Weele

This inspiring book contains the lively responses of 42 of hundreds of teachers who were asked this question: What ideas and experiences have kept you vital and alive to teaching and learning? Two assumptions seem to lurk in the question: (1) that teaching has become so demanding that it is a wonder anyone goes into teaching at all, and (2) that no consensus exists about how to measure the competence, effectiveness and, well, mystique of a given teacher, as can be done for other professions.

The appeal of teaching

So, what do these 42 master teachers tell us about why, against all common sense, they stay teaching and, in some cases, returned to it after leaving for a period of time? The answers come in the form of essays, stories, poems, lyrical prose, art, even a classroom scenario. All are imaginative and witty, and all show resourcefulness and energy. The book, thus, has an aesthetic appeal and is a real pleasure to handle.

Since the contributing teachers have taught for a minimum of 15 years, their observations come from long experience and thoughtful perspective. What comes through, typically, directly or indirectly, are such notions as these: the mystery of every student, the liberation that comes from stereotypes challenged, the benefit that can derive from confidences kept at some risk, and the surprise at how well some recalcitrant students turn out — many of them becoming teachers themselves. Almost all

report how teaching has changed them, and a number describe how improvisational teaching at times has succeeded better than

the planned lesson. Some admit to times when their responsibilities kept them from eating or sleeping.

Unforgettable accounts

Several of the responses are dramatic and memorable. Margaret M. Wong tells of that unforgettable night in August, 1949, when the father roused the family and told them they had to leave China immediately to avoid the oncoming Communist army. Facing the loss of all of their

material possessions — they had been well off — he reminded them that the one thing they could retain no matter what happened was the knowledge in their heads. These words inspired her to become a teacher.

The race issue also elicited a tender story. Peter, a black student, was so enamored of his white teacher that in singing her praises to his mother she assumed that, of course, such a fine teacher had to be black. It was liberating for all to accept the reality.

A remarkable fact of the book is that none of these teachers relate their work to the even larger dimensions of religious education. That is, of course, regrettable. What partly offsets this omission is the wide variety of places, here

and abroad, of schools, specialties, and personalities represented. Peter De Boer's *The Wisdom of Teaching* represents an effort of this kind for the Christian school movement. We can use more of such celebrations.

A final note. I was present at the meeting where a copy of this book was presented to the retiring editor of CEJ, Lorna Van Gilst. I suggest that any reprint of this book should include teacher number 43 — Lorna herself — who would ably supply the Christian anthropology lacking in this collection.

