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When Everything Is a Song

Editorial


Bert Witvoet

Why Do We Sing?

My sister-in-law's mother died of Alzheimer's disease several years ago. Towards the end of her mother's life, communication was almost non-existent, except when my sister-in-law would sing songs her mother had learned earlier in life, especially psalms and hymns. These songs elicited a response where otherwise eyes remained blank, and mouth still. Babies noticeably respond to singing, and children love to engage in it. One might conclude from this and many other examples that singing is very basic to our existence. It seems to go to and come from the core of our being.

But something happens to most children on their way to adulthood. As they become more self-conscious of their place in their social environment, singing, especially in public, becomes less and less frequent. This is, no doubt, a cultural development peculiar to our time and situation. I say this because of what my son told me and because of what I remember and know of the past. I think the devil is behind it. When the enemy sowed tares among the wheat in the parable of the tares, some of those tares fell on vocal chords.

My son spent some time in Nigeria in the '80s. He found it remarkable that young and old would break out into song without being prompted. Teenagers, boys and girls, did not seem to hold back when it came to singing in public, whether alone or in a group, he said. He was keenly aware of how different things were back home in Canada.

My own experience as a youth confirms what I heard a few seniors tell me: "We sang a lot as a family." "We used to sing on Sunday evenings. An old doctor used to walk past our house. He enjoyed our singing so much." "My dad would sing and my mother would tell stories. You never forget that."

Song memories

I can add my own anecdote to these accounts. We sang a lot at home when I was young. My three older siblings and I would lie in bed at night and sing songs in two or three-part harmony. Mom would stand at the bottom of the stairs, she told us later, and drink it in. Without becoming nostalgic about these things, I can say that there was something very wholesome about our desire for singing. There is a German saying that goes as follows: "Wo man singt, da lass dich nieder, böse menschen haben keine lieder" (Where people sing, feel free to settle there; evil people don't have any songs).

There are sad stories, too, about singing that come to us from the past. This is what an eighty-year-old man told me: "I can't sing. I can't read any notes. But what if others tell you that you can't sing? This happened to me when I sat next to my boss in a church in the Netherlands. He could sing really well, and he knew it too. I sat next to him doing my best. After church he said to me, 'The way you sing, you may as well keep your mouth shut.' That really happened to me, and it hurt. It took me a long time to get over that. Why do we sing anyway? When I was young, I used to sing when no one heard me, and then I could sing to my heart's content." The man's voice broke when he told me this, and his eyes filled with tears at the painful memory of that insensitive and arrogant remark. He has since departed this world and may well be giving singing lessons to his former boss in heaven, provided the man has softened his heart.

A spiritual act

"Why do we sing anyway?" my elderly friend had asked. I know what he meant. He was talking about singing in church, and the idea there is that God is not first of all interested in how well you carry a tune, but whether your heart is in tune with God's heart. Our congregational singing of psalms and hymns is not first of all to be subordinated to aesthetic norms. But does God judge us the same way when we sing a ditty? Yes, in the sense that our hearts always need to be aligned with God's pleasure. That is not to say that all our singing has to focus on God and faith in him. The primary purpose of our singing may be play or entertainment. Bert Polman points out in an interview article on page 7 of this issue that singing is primarily a communal activity. Marguerite Witvoet in her article on p. 10 says that singing is an expression of the soul. I would like to add that singing is at all times a spiritual act, whether we are singing about Jesus or about a prostitute. In both cases, we are to offer our vocal chords as living sacrifices.

> *"Evil people have no song."*

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world," urges Paul, "but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." I hear him say that we should not let our culture spoil the fun of singing. Let's in our homes and schools keep the joy of singing alive. Batter the walls of peer pressure; besiege the principalities of professionalism and individualism.

Why do we sing anyway? We may as well ask why a robin sings or a geranium blooms. It's one way in which we fulfil our potential as humane creatures, and through it we can glorify God. Remember: evil people have no song.

Turning All of Life into a Song

by Mary Lagerwey

Mary Lagerwey teaches Bible part-time at Illiana Christian High School. This article is an abbreviated version of a chapel speech she gave at her school. (lagerwey@avenew.com)

I've always been bothered by people who don't sing in church or chapel when they have the opportunity. Some people claim that they are praising God only while listening and not participating when a song or hymn is being sung, and perhaps they are. But by not singing when we have a chance, we miss an opportunity to praise, perhaps even glimpsing continuous praise to God when that song rings around our head for the rest of the day. Singing out loud also accomplishes one of the primary goals of praise: it keeps the focus on God because our mind and our body are occupied with one purpose. Perhaps that's why singing is such a wonderful method of praise and is so often mentioned in the Bible.

While doing some research in the Bible on the subject of praise, I began to realize that I don't know nearly enough.

One of the first things I discovered is that praise isn't about you. (And it's not about me, either.) Let me explain. Praise is our job — it's something we need to do — but it's not about us. It's especially not about how we feel. One pastor in our area pointed out that God doesn't care how we look. I'd like to add that God doesn't care how we feel either. (Yes, of course, God does care whether we're happy or sad, so let me explain.) We must praise God even when we don't feel like it. If we're tired or in a bad mood, lazy or preoccupied , crabby or stressed out so we don't feel like praising God, God has something to say to us: "Get over it."

The praise command

Praise isn't about feelings. How do I know? Because praise is commanded. "Praise God," the Bible says. That's the command form of the verb, so we know it's not optional. Therefore, we must praise God, in everything we do, including mowing the lawn and doing homework, making dinner and directing a drama production, grading papers and shoveling the driveway.

But an interesting thing will happen when we start praising God while we're doing the ordinary tasks of daily life, perhaps by humming "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow" while scrubbing the floor. Our attitude will get better; we'll start to sound (and act) as if we really mean it when we hum our praise; our sense of pitch may even improve! That's because when we start with praise, no matter how we feel, the feelings will follow. If we go through the motions of praise before we really feel like it, pretty soon we will feel like it.

That's why the idea of vowing to praise is so important in the Bible. Over and over again the writers of the Bible promise God that they will praise him after he delivers them and answers their prayers. This is so important for us to remember. Is our thank-you letter to God as long as our wish list? Do we ask for things — even really good things — and then when we get them we just move on to the next request? (I must admit: my mom is the one who taught me about this.)

While I was pregnant with our third child, Esther, after miscarrying two others, Rob and I prayed every day for those sometimes long nine months, pleading with God for that child who was to be born. Then, after she arrived — all healthy and cute and 8 pounds, 4 ounces — we vowed to say "thank you" to God for as long as we had said "please." I can remember when Esther turned nine months old, and she had been out as long as she was in, that I was thinking how much easier it was to keep asking God for something every day and how much harder it was to be faithful about praising God for the answer.

A public act

Another reason that praise isn't about you is that praise is primarily public. In

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the Bible, praise is almost never a matter of me in my little room saying "Praise God" in a whisper or just in my mind. Praise has to come out — out of the heart — and be shown. And that implies we somehow have to do it publicly. Maybe it will be public praise just in front of one or two friends in the locker room or in front of many people in a public restaurant where you praise God in prayer. Here's one reason why church and chapel are so important. Being together with other Christians helps our praise: we think of new reasons to praise and new ways to praise. Last year I was involved in a prayer group with several other women. One of my prayer partners would often say "Hallelujah!" in the middle of her prayers or the prayers spoken by the rest of us. Her praising God — because "Hallelujah" means "Praise the Lord" — helped me to see why I should be joining in praising God. Yes, praise God no one was hurt today; praise God for Christian schools; praise God for the sunshine and the cool breeze.

He is worthy

Which brings me to point two about praise: if it's not about us, whom is it about? It's about God, of course. God deserves our praise. He is worthy. God desires our praise. God will get the praise he deserves. The focus of praise has to be God: what he is like and what he has done. What is God like? Praise him because he is righteous and just, holy and mighty, creative and amazing, never failing and always providing, merciful and kind, loving and never ending, caring and powerful, and the list goes on. That's why the old and tried kids' prayer is so right on the mark: "God is great. God is good." That's *where* praise has to start, and it's *why* praise has to start.

But do we have to praise God for traffic jams and for the fact that our toast landed in the kitty litter box butter side down? I don't think we have to praise God *for* all circumstances but *in* all circumstances. Let me explain.

A year ago at this time I was having trouble with my eyes so I was seeing lots of experts — I mean twice as many experts as other people because I had double vision. Having double vision is no fun. I had to shut one eye in order to do anything, and that made me tired. I had no depth perception, so going down stairs was more interesting than usual. Did I praise God for that? No. Every day I prayed that it would go away, and I cried when it didn't. And then someone told me I could consider surgery if it didn't go away in ... a year.

But I still praised God *in* that circumstance: for friends who made me supper, for the friend who washed my bathrooms and floors on her knees, for music that I could enjoy with my eyes shut, for a healthy baby, for love, for a dad who drove me to all my doctor's appointments and acted like it was just what he wanted to do that day. I praised God for experts like neurologists and ophthalmologists and neuro-ophthalmologists (I'm not making this up). But most of all I praised God because I knew that he was in control and I was not. We don't have to say, "Yippee, Hallelujah, praise the Lord — the sump pump backed up into the basement," but we do have to say, "Hallelujah, God is Ruler, Savior, Guide."

Part of breathing

So, praise isn't about you, it is about God, and it's about time. Psalm 150 says, "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord." Got breath? Yep. We all have breath (some of us even have bad breath). So we need to praise God — yes, all the time, in all that we do as long as we live. That's a tall order. And praise will look different on different people. I praise God by talking — a lot— and you may never give a speech in public. But you can praise by listening.

There's a great hymn that talks about this idea of praising God with our whole life. Look at these words: "Fill thou, my life, O Lord, my God, in every part with praise, that my whole being may proclaim Thy being and Thy ways. Not for the lips of praise alone nor even the praising heart I ask, but for a life made up of praise in every part."

Praise in every part. How can our lives be filled like that? Verse two gives us some hints: "Praise in the common words I speak, life's common looks and tones, in fellowship enjoyed at home with my beloved ones, enduring wrong reproach or loss with sweet and steadfast will, forgiving freely those who hate, returning good for ill."

But verse three provides the ultimate challenge: "So shall each fear, each fret, each care be turned into a song, and every winding of the way the echo shall prolong. So shall no part of day or night from sacredness be free, but all my life, in every step be fellowship with Thee." Can we say that each fear, each fret, each care will be turned into a song? How can we possibly do that, you say? That depends on what you think praise is.

After my incomplete learning, I do have a definition: praise is not playing "Survivor" or "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?" or even "Who Wants to Have More Money to Tithe With?" It's playing follow the leader. It's walking with God and letting him do the leading, while I follow, singing about what a great leader he is and showing what a great leader he is by how I follow him every day in every way.

Sing for the Joy of It!

by Sandra Elgersma

Sandra Elgersma teaches music on the Clayburn Hills campus of the Abbotsford Christian School Society in Abbotsford, B.C.

"Miss Elgersma! Will you please nominate us so we can enter the Millenium B.C. Boys' Choir?" Two eager grade five boys came up to me after school one day with a newspaper article in their hands. They had read about an opportunity to join a boys choir but in order to qualify they had to be nominated by their school music teacher. I was delighted to nominate them, not only because I had every confidence in them as singers, but also because it thrilled me to see their enthusiasm for singing.

The boys' parents made a commitment in driving them to six practices about an hour away from our local community, and the boys learned nine songs from memory in a few weeks. When I attended the concert held in a magnificent concert hall just before Christmas, I knew the time and effort had been worth it. Sitting up on the balcony listening to the sounds of Christmas through the voices of 200 young boys made me thankful and proud to be a music teacher. The boys learned not only about singing technique; they also experienced the joy of singing. The boys' classmates got to hear all about the concert, and they were given tips about singing properly as well. The entire experience reinforced the idea that boys can sing well and enjoy it, too.

Its own rewards

Though boys (and girls) may be reluctant singers, educators can make singing an important and wonderful experience for children. I don't want anyone to miss out on the thrill of being able to sing, and as an elementary general music teacher I will continue to promote and encourage boys and girls, and men and women, to sing and make music for the sheer joy of it!

Our culture today has turned music into a commodity, something to be used, bought, sold, listened to, and discarded at will. Rather than music being an integral part of our daily lives, it is often something we add on to make our "education richer," our lives "more knowledgeable," our brains "more capable," our worship "more meaningful." When music is "used" as a tool whereby other parts of our lives are enriched, music–making becomes an end to serve a purpose. However, God created us with minds that are capable of creating and making beautiful music and, therefore, music must remain an art form that stands on its own. Singing is an essential element of music that children can learn to appreciate and participate in because it is part of God's creation.

How can we encourage and create enthusiasm for singing in our students? Why do our boys and girls often appear reluctant to sing? What can we do in our schools to promote singing and help our students to enjoy singing? How do we get our children to sing? Allow me to share some thoughts and ideas on the topic, focusing on students at the elementary level.

Be a role model

Children need to see adults praising God through singing. Teachers can sing with their class for devotions, for social studies as they learn about another country, or in P. E. as they play a singing game or dance. Teachers can sing for their communal devotions, form a choir and sing to the students who are graduating, join with the students and sing along in the school musical, and lead in worship at chapels, singing solos or participating in small ensembles. These are all ways that students will see their teachers involved in music-making and realize that singing is a vital part of work and worship.

A comfortable setting

As music educator I see creating a safe setting as a very important aspect of getting children to sing. If you think about singing for yourself, think about how vulnerable it makes you feel. If you have ever had a bad experience with singing, it can make you feel very afraid to sing again. Children need to feel safe in order to be willing to sing. Make the classroom a safe place so they will feel secure enough to

be willing to share the greatest instrument of all — the voice.

Included in creating a safe place for singing, I believe, is building a rapport with students. Where there is trust and respect, there is a place to share. Where there is caring and love, there is room to explore and discover. If students know they can try out their singing voice and no one will laugh at them, they will be willing to sing. If students know the teacher will support them in their singing, they will be able to expose their voice to those around them. If students understand that God loves their praise regardless of the timbre of their instrument, they can sing out in confidence.

Begin early

Singing needs to be present at school from the day children walk into the classroom. Children at all levels want to participate and be involved in the daily activities of the class. If singing is part of the day, children will feel comfortable and familiar with their own voices. To begin singing at age 10 or 11 is frightening because students have not had the time to experiment and discover their own vocal capabilities.

Provide students with the opportunity to sing often. Take the students out into the community to sing for others. Develop small programs to share the songs students learn in school with seniors in old age residences. Take the higher elementary students out to other schools for a one day mini-tour to share their songs and musical abilities. Perform a school musical and get everyone involved in singing. Make a CD with your school. Ask other choirs to come to your school to give a concert, or ask a professional singer or children's entertainer to perform. Allow students the opportunity to compose and perform their own songs. Make singing an exciting activity in which students want to become involved. Once they're involved in singing, they will come up with their own opportunities as the two grade five boys did.

When singing becomes an integral part of the educational day, when singing isn't only relegated to the music room, and when students see the school as a "singing school," we can create an atmosphere where reluctant singers have no choice but to tune up their God-given instrument and be a praise creature of the Most High!

Singing a Communal and Humane Act

Interview with Bert Polman

Dr. Bert Polman (bpolman@redeemer.on.ca) is professor and chair of music at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario.

CEJ: *Professor Polman, you have a strong interest in congregational singing because you often accompany congregations by playing the organ in churches and you have worked on the Christian Reformed Church's Psalter Hymnal Revision Committee in the past. What is your take on singing as a whole? Do people sing less or less well today than they used to?*

Polman: Most definitely. When I think back to what my parents and many other families did many years ago, I recall that there would be regular devotions at the table, which included the singing together of a song. Years ago, some families had Sunday evening hymn sings around the organ or piano. Parents would sing to their infants. People would sing at work or in the home during the day.

People sing so little these days, but it is the one musical thing we can all do. Ninety-nine percent of us can sing! That a few of us cannot sing is due either to inadequate singing in the home before age six (which really emphasizes the importance of singing often with infants and preschoolers!) or because of loss of hearing or problems with the nerves in the larynx

(as in my case).

We live in a much less participatory culture today. When I watch a ball game on TV, I notice that, as the camera pans across the spectators during the "singing" of the national anthem, few people actually sing or even mouth the words with the soloist. During a British soccer game the crowd or people in the English pubs will sing with great gusto. In North American games we have cheerleaders who shout and sing for us, and sport audiences in our bars tend not to sing, but only hoot and holler during televised events. Our health leaders are promoting "participaction" – take a walk, swim, bike, etc. Similarly, we need more communal music-making to build our sense of being human together.

CEJ: *Why the change?*

Polman: It's partly an urban and partly a media phenomenon. Having somebody else perform for you permits an audience to become a couch potato, to be "the lonely crowd," for it is the easy way out. Thus, we pay high salaries to our professional athletes and our pop star musicians and actors. Christian broadcasts on radio and TV tend to feature soloists or professional musicians, but do little to encourage you to sing along with the "congregation." We're even doing this in missionary work: little cassette players and plastic records with hand-driven turntables are dropped off in the jungle; these feature western-style music which, again, favors listening-only among the natives, rather than having them do the actual singing.

One of the ironies of living together in urban places is that people are more lonely there than when they lived in rural communities, and communal music-making could counteract that loneliness, but our culture would rather "have someone else do it for us." And so we listen while others perform for us, we watch while others do athletics, we sit in silence while others "do" worship for us.

CEJ: *Music-making is one thing, but what about listening skills?*

Polman: Music is ever-present in today's society. Muzak is played in the factory, malls and elevators, even through telephones while you wait. We hear so much music all the time that we don't listen well anymore to anything. Even in some churches, prayers are accompanied by music played softly, and we certainly cannot tolerate silence. Car ignition switches are programmed so that the car's stereo radio comes on even before the motor starts! We now live in a womb surrounded by perpetual music which is as devastating as pollution. Even a hiker in the back forest is likely to encounter other hikers with a ghetto blaster on their shoulders or earphones umbilically tied to a "walkperson" cassette player.

In the music appreciation courses I teach at Redeemer, I will tell my students periodically to drop everything else, put aside their homework, get a cool drink, and listen carefully to a piece of music. "You have to free yourself from other activities to listen to this piece," I will tell them, for listening is hard work these days, and a number of modern folks are out of practice — they don't listen well to music nor to personal conversations! Of course, you can't listen that intently to all the music we hear, but periodically we need to pay special attention to get the most benefit from listening to music.

CEJ: *What can we do to improve this?*

Polman: We need models; we need people who listen well, who sing often, and who demonstrate in their very lives that music-making is an important part of community-building. Communal singing is still practiced in many traditional places in Africa. It is a constituent part of what it means to be a community, a family, a school group, or a church. In Africa you play together as adults and children; you sing together, dance together, and (sometimes) starve together. In some rural communities in North America we still find families who come together for reunions and who sing together, or communities who do barn dances and singalongs together.

Modeling is a crucial factor, especially in schools. Singing for a boy whose voice changes can be embarrassing. For some of them, their voice can go up and down for six months, while other boys' voices change almost overnight. I think that male teachers can do a lot to set the example. When male teachers sing in the school choir and sing heartily in the assembly, that helps immensely. And if a music teacher can get the star basketball player to sing, you immediately get another 15 boys and girls to sing, too!

CEJ: *What impact does popular music have on young children?*

Polman: Pop singers — our most prevalent and influential models — exhibit a variety of vocal skills. Some are good vocal models, while others appear to flaunt their poor vocal technique. Many pop singers sing in a lower range of their voices, and children will imitate that lower range. I believe that any typical elementary boy or girl should be singing in the soprano range for their voices to develop properly, and not to attempt singing with a lower throaty sound.

Elders and deacons can sing together in church. If you can identify a group of leaders who are willing to sing out their soul, that sends out a marvelous message to a new generation. Some church soloists use a sound track recording for ac-

companiment, instead of making use of the best instrumental talent available in the local congregation. In my congregation, the music committee vetoes accompaniment tracks on the grounds that "thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's orchestra!" We want live music-making to happen in our church. We want the best music-making to happen in the community and the schools, and with diligent practice, it is going to be live, participatory music.

CEJ: *How does music bind us together?*

Polman: Singing can be an individual thing, of course, but it is most of all a social thing. Singing in the shower is fine, perhaps the only place in the house where the acoustics are good, but the essential nature of singing is communal. The best eating experiences are communal in nature, just like the best sleeping times for mom and dad (and, in the past, even with children in the same bed) are communal. We can all sing. That's the one musical thing that binds people together. Let parents and siblings sing along with Raffi, and with Lois, Sharon & Bram as a younger child is encouraged to sing. In this age of CDs and cassettes, we hear much music with which we can sing along, in which we become participants in the music-making and community-building. That is why most children's song artists encourage singing along at their concerts.

Singing is not only human; it is humane. The family that sings together, that holds hands, prays, dances, and cries together — you can fill in the blanks — is the family that experiences community. Ditto for schools and churches. Because it is usually such a social event, music-making helps us negotiate the up and down experiences of life in togetherness — we share experiences together and we can express ourselves about these experiences together in song.

CEJ: *What happens with emotions in music?*

Polman: Whether you sing lyrics or vocables (with no discernible text, e.g., lalalala), or moan, you express what lives in your heart and share that socially with the community. Music conveys "neighborhoods of meaning"; that is, within a given culture we often experience that a given piece of music expresses joy or sadness (or many other emotions), or paints an aural picture of a thing or event.

CEJ: *An oral picture?*

Polman: Yes, aural, meaning of the ear.

CEJ: *Oh,* that *oral ... I mean, aural.*

Polman: Yes. Through this aural picture we'll have a general consensus in our community on what that piece of music means, but, at the same time, this "neighborhood of meaning" permits each of us to experience our own nuances of that meaning. Adding a text layer to music, i.e., expressing a text with music, makes the whole communication more profound. And our deepest emotions are best expressed beyond words. You can't really just say "Allelu Yahweh" [Alleluia: praise the Lord], for to really mean this, you have to sing it, and, best of all, dance an "alleluia!"

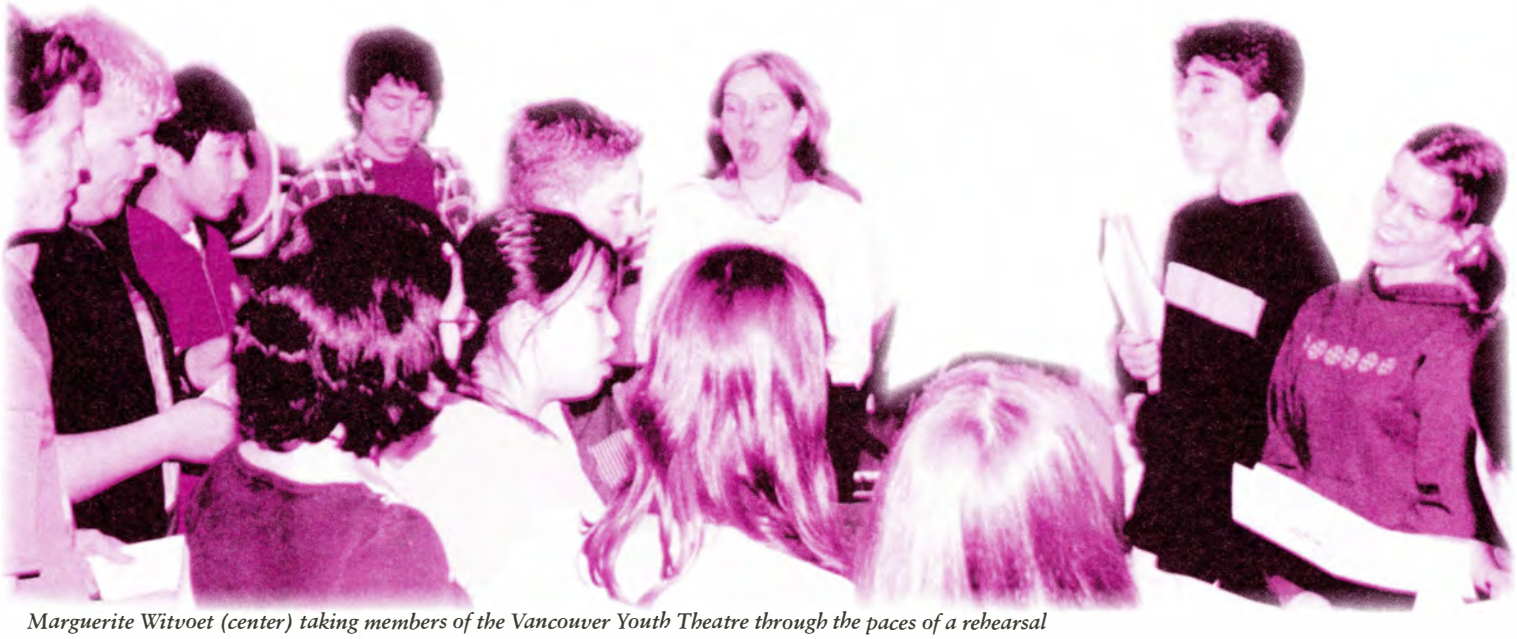
CEJ: *What about our sad feelings?*

Polman: Singing serves a whole range of emotions and meanings. That's why we lament in the psalms and the blues; that is why many cultures have a large repertoire of funeral music. Given the shape of the world and what we hear in one hour of commercials, one hour of news, or one hour of a movie (take your choice!), there is so much to lament in our world, and much about which we may rejoice. Singing only praise and up-beat worship songs is merely half the coin in church. We need to recover ways of expressing sorrow and compassion in our church songs. That's why the kleenex box has become the new liturgical furniture: we offer spoken prayer times with a therapeutic kleenex box nearby. Singing used to be one way in which that therapy was accomplished. But I'm pleased that a recovery of singing the lament psalms is beginning to happen in modern church music.

CEJ: *As I listen to your voice [Polman speaks hoarsely], I am amazed that you should be so concerned about singing.*

Polman: I love singing, but due to vocal paralysis some 25 years ago, I cannot sing at all. I've spent much of my professional life in the preparation of hymn books so that other people can sing communally. When I hear other groups of people sing — at church, at a family reunion, or a school — I'm immensely consoled in my own loss, and am determined to work even more diligently for continued participaction-style music-making. I'm happy that people are beginning to show more interest in the communal nature of singing, that they are finding out again how important music-making is as a vital constituent element of building a human — and humane — community. I certainly hope that Christian families, churches, and schools will flourish as hotbeds of such participatory singing.

Where Everything Is Music



Marguerite Witvoet (center) taking members of the Vancouver Youth Theatre through the paces of a rehearsal

by Marguerite Witvoet

Marguerite Witvoet (mwit@telus.net) is a pianist, musical director and vocal coach living and working in Vancouver, B.C. She is a member of the Vancouver chamber ensemble Standing Wave and works frequently with singers of all ages in contemporary opera.

From a roar to a whisper, the human voice spans a remarkable range. Made of flesh and bone, fueled by air, it is highly flexible and is capable of expressing an infinite variety of emotions with its vast tonal palette. Yet many of us use only a very limited portion of our available expressive reserves, living our lives within the narrow octave-or-so range of the average speaking voice. It is only under extraordinary circumstances, such as moments of extreme danger, emotional anguish or joy when our voice erupts in a forceful *cri de coeur* ("WATCH OUT!" "WE WON!" "I HATE YOU!") or during physical exertion such as weightlifting or childbirth, that we recognize the enormous power of this instrument which we carry with us at all times and which is our birthright: the right God gave us at birth — to speak.

True vocal release is an exhilarating experience. As infants, we have no problem exercising our vocal muscles. The first thing we do upon entering this world is to cry in outrage, and babies can cry for hours without ever getting a sore throat, a perfect example of sound vocal technique. Young children, too, seem to carry a natural license for expression — just listen to the sounds wafting out of the average playground. But as we develop into our intermediate, teen and adult years, many things conspire to keep our voices down. Societal pressures, cultural limitations, gender expectations, family habits and personal fears combine to shame us into silence: "Use your inside voice, honey," "Now be a good girl/big boy and keep quiet when the needle goes in," "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all," "Your voice is ruining the choir's sound; just mouth the words."

Committed release

We learn to contain our voices. We become quite adept at controlling them, in fact, and can maintain them at a manageable size... *most* of the time. Sometimes our voices fail us, refusing to come out when we want or, like sleeping dragons, rise and betray us. When we do attempt to release our voice in a self-conscious manner, extending it cautiously beyond our normal vocal range like a toe reaching into unfamiliar waters, what often comes out is a sort of strangulated sound, half given, half taken, as if we wished we could retract the sound from the air even as we sing.

What we have managed to lose over the years is our *commitment* to the sound we are making. Babies who cry for hours are totally committed, body and soul, to the sound they are producing and, therefore, suffer no vocal fatigue. In fact, the sound is just part of a larger picture of need, distress or frustration. We all have the ability to roar, crackle and whisper without vocal stress, but only when we

learn to release ourselves completely, with imagination, to the sound we are making, without the usual apologetic retraction which accompanies and stifles it even as it is being produced, creating tension and, eventually, irritation in the throat.

Imaginative engagement

"The voice is the muscle of the soul," a former teacher of mine (Richard Armstrong, founding member of the innovative and influential Roy Hart Theatre in England) says frequently. In my own vocal explorations as well as in my work as a vocal coach and music director for opera and music theater, I have learned to recognize the profound truth of this statement and to appreciate the manifold beauty as this muscle is unveiled, released, exercised and, eventually, channeled into a powerful expressive force. The move from speech into song is a particularly valuable way of facilitating this process, as the extended range and flexibility required in singing allow an individual to step out of the normal vocal skin and be transported into the elevated state of musical expression.

If the voice is the muscle of the soul, then the eyes are the window, and a listless, facial expression often accompanies a flat dull voice. On the other hand, when a singer is engaged imaginatively with their eyes, the voice will be equally energized. For this reason I encourage singers to warm up their *imaginations* as they warm up their voice. Using our imagination, a simple glissando up and down becomes a roller-coaster ride, complete with terrified or thrilled faces and thrown arms; a musical recitation of the alphabet becomes a hysterical joke with the punch line "XYZ" or a lengthy list of reasons why homework has not been finished; and yet another vocal exercise becomes a curtain call in a large auditorium full of cheering fans, completely transforming the space *and* the sound.

Adventures in sound

When working with singers, whether children, teens or adults, I tend to treat the voice metaphorically, or symptomatically. Rather than aiming for the perfect tone at the outset, I prefer to let the voice go where it wants to go, trusting that true pearls may be found in the unlikeliest places. "Vocal work," to quote Richard Armstrong again, "requires 49 percent technique and 51 percent imagination." A greater degree of adventurous play in our vocal work, and a lesser degree of correctness frees up the imagination as well as the mind and allows the voice, if not to roar immediately, then at least to play around freely as a kitten. Ironically, by not worrying about result, and instead focusing on the process of exploration, our expectations may often be surpassed, as a voice emerges spontaneously, of its own accord, in surprising ways.

As a singer is exploring in this manner, cracks in the voice will sometimes appear, much like cobwebs in an unexplored space, or as a manifestation of tension surrounding the undertaking of a new "risky" form of expression. Rather than viewing this as a problem to be corrected, I've learned to appreciate these cracks and strands as part of the charm and natural history of a particular individual, a gritty expression of our common humanity. "Lord, may this life always surprise me," says Ben Okri in his novel *Dangerous Loves*. "Fill every crack with light." Too many singers try to *avoid* the cracks out of fear and, therefore, miss out on the possibilities of light they might find within them. Singing only pure tones and avoiding strident, nasal, or broken sounds is like painting with pastel colors only; what's missing are the deep browns and umbers — the shadows that make the light that much more striking.

The drifter

An exclusive focus on intonation is also something I avoid. Often, when someone is having trouble matching a pitch, I simply allow them to "swim" around in the group until they find their place. Rather than talking about being tone-deaf or off-key, I prefer to think of these individuals as suffering from a certain resistance to blending with the group. Often the "drifter" is the class clown or a person who goes against the grain in other ways, and so, rather than adding to the problem by making them musical outcasts as well — by demanding or shaming them into consonance — I try to find ways of gently inviting them in. Often, as they begin to feel comfortable vocalizing, the pitch settles and they quite naturally fall into the "groove" with the other singers. In some cases, when singers continue to drift, rather than put them on the spot and force them to find the group, like lost lambs, I will find *them*; i.e., I'll switch pitches on the piano or join them vocally on their note, then gently bring them down or up to the appropriate pitch. Once they are there, I ask the singers to remember the feeling of being consonant with the pitch, how it "gels" and feels "right."

Reach for the stars

While I have so far been stressing the need to protect an individual's natural tendencies, it is also important to remember that the point of the exercise is to *expand* one's expressive capabilities. "Let your throat-song be clear and strong enough to make an emperor fall full-length, suppliant at the door," says the 13th-century poet Rumi. Achieving this level of strength means moving beyond the comfort zone from time to time. There

is a dance of sorts which occurs between singer and coach as the voice is both accommodated and gently pushed forward towards greater flexibility and effectiveness.

Moving beyond the comfort zone often means encouraging people to explore their opposite, or shadow side. Often the most beautiful sounds are the most unexpected, like hidden gems brought up from the ocean floor: a brash individual may reveal a beautifully fragile and delicate sound when encouraged in that direction, while a more acquiescent personality may come up with a deliciously strident sound; likewise, someone who tends to move a lot may find unexpected strength and rootedness in stillness, while another who stiffly plants himself may benefit from freedom in movement. A person who tends to engage their right side only when singing may hear something new when they move their left as well, and vice versa. The object is not so much about right or wrong posture in this case, but about individual exploration and experimentation outside of one's normal patterns.

Sips of breath

One of the most common forms of resistance to full vocal expression is the holding or blocking of the breath. By holding our breath — physically and emotionally — we remain at a surface level with our own voices and bodies and avoid the "scary" feelings which might arise when we are connected. When we breathe, we acknowledge. When we acknowledge, we feel. When we feel, we can release. "Don't let your throat tighten with fear. Take sips of breath all day and night, before death closes your mouth," advises the poet Rumi.

Overcoming this fear means revitalizing a connection to the body. As the body is engaged and open, so is the sound (as anyone who has witnessed or experienced childbirth can attest). Look for physical tension at the knees, hips or shoulders, which serve to inhibit breathing and block the sound. Even when still, a singer should never be in a locked position. An open, flexible stance such as that used in martial arts or tai chi is perfect. To check stance, get singers to face each other and then gently try to push each other over at the shoulder; if their position is ungrounded or uncentered in any way, they will be particularly precarious and lose balance easily. By keeping their center of gravity low and their bodies relaxed, singers gain access to their own strength. Feet should be planted shoulder-width apart, knees, hips and shoulders unlocked, with the pelvis slightly tucked or "seated." Head erect, as if a string is holding the head up like a marionette. Shoulders relaxed.

Once the body is open and relaxed, the next important step is to establish a healthy pattern for breathing. A sure sign of superficial breathing is the lifted shoulder. To encourage a full intake of breath, singers need to breathe further down into the rib cage, imagining the ribs swinging out and up like handles on a pail as the rib cage expands. The shoulders themselves should remain relaxed or dropped throughout. Often singers do not include or engage the back half of their body when they breathe; to counteract this, have the students pair off and have one singer place their hands on the other's back; palms spread out, cradling the shoulder blades. The other singer should then attempt to breathe "into" the hands on his back, expanding the rib cage in the area of the shoulder blade, inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth. Another surefire way to open up breathing is to have the singers drop over at the waist, hug themselves and breathe slowly and deeply "into" their lower back.

Cultural baggage

Timid voices are often a big problem with adolescent girls and some women who are socially conditioned to express only "nice" or "positive" emotions. This again is always a matter of breath and of a tension in the body which serves to block the full release and inhalation of that breath. There are numerous ways to address this problem. Pushing against a wall or another person while singing engages the diaphragm and releases body tension; often a strong, powerful voice will soar out unexpectedly, shocking the singer, who never knew she possessed such power of expression. Stamping the feet, punching the air or throwing an imaginary baseball while singing can similarly serve to "dislodge" the voice through physical exertion. An increase in perspective by sending one's gaze out the window and sending the voice to an imaginary audience across the field or road can also help to increase volume and projection.

In contrast, men and boys tend to be uncomfortable with the higher, more vulnerable sounds in their upper falsetto range, preferring instead the rumbling safety of the more "manly" depths. A gentle exploration of *all* the sounds available to them, including the fragile and delicate, will help them to round out their expressive tool kit.

Having the singer look other people directly in the eye while singing may help them to overcome a fear of communication, especially when the subject matter carries some emotional weight. A general

encouragement of a variety of expressions, especially so-called negative ones, including anger, silliness and aggression gives these singers "license" to be more fully expressive.

More than speech

Sometimes an inexperienced singer will "speak" a song in clipped tones, not daring to extend his/her voice beyond its normal patterns of speech. Yet song is a heightened form of expression, and demands a more intense vocal involvement than everyday speech.

A way of approaching this is to have the singer sing the musical line on vowels only, imagining that he is pulling an unbroken ribbon out of his mouth as he sings each phrase. Once this is mastered and the feeling of continuity is achieved, he can bring the consonants back in, threading them like tiny glittering jewels onto this spiraling ribbon of sound.

Another singer who tends to flatten all consonants out in the quest for a legato tone will benefit from repeating the line several times on consonants only, creating their own little percussion solo before re-assimilating the vowels and melody back into the texture.

All of the above suggestions represent but a smattering of approaches, a tiny corner within the vast and complex world of vocal exploration. Most have been borrowed, transformed and continue to evolve, as the needs of a particular singer or group of singers demand. The key to successful vocal work is an open spirit, a flexible mind and a healthy respect for the peculiar quirks and challenges a particular voice brings to us.

Above all, as teachers, coaches and directors, we must develop our own skills of observation and listening, engaging our own creative resources in finding continually new and imaginative ways to release and harness the vocal powers God has given those with whom we are working, without exerting a rigid judgment on the sounds which appear as we do so: falling, as our 13th century friend Rumi says, "into the place where *everything* is music."

Books to Read:

Kristine Linklater, *Freeing the Natural Voice* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, c. 1976)

Patsy Rodenburg, *The Right to Speak: Working With the Voice* (London: Methuen Drama, 1992)

Patsy Rodenburg, *The Need for Words: Voice and the Text* (London: Methuen Drama, 1993)

Pauline Le Bel, Pauline, *The Songspinner* (Red Deer, Alta. : Red Deer College Press, 1994). This is a novellette for young people: In the land of Pindrop, silence is not only golden, it's the law.

All Rumi quotes taken from *The Essential Rumi*, translations by Coleman Barks, c. 1995, Harper, San Francisco.

Children Singing His Praise

by Margaret Brouillette
Margaret Brouilette (brouillette@sympatico.ca) lives in Saint Luc, Quebec.

A woman in her forties was stranded alone in a stalled elevator in Las Vegas — the city that she had only recently characterized as "the toilet of North America." She didn't believe it could get worse than being sent there on business, until her elevator got stuck. The woman — we'll call her Kathy — didn't have many options. She pushed the emergency button, sat down in a corner and … sang the songs she had learned in Sunday school.

Why does this not surprise us?

I consulted a number of Christian education and music specialists to find out what makes music such an important part of our lives, and how its power can be used to pass our faith along to our children.

An expression of God's nature

The Bible opens with five very powerful words: "In the beginning God created." Men and women who were made in his image reflect the creative personality of God through artistic expression. "There is in human beings a universal creative instinct, an appreciation of the esthetic, a drive to surpass the mundane and imagine the exquisite," according to Lillian Heron, college music teacher. The instructions God gives for the building of the tabernacle in the desert demonstrate the role of the senses and the value of artistic accomplishment. From the embroidery to the sculpture, the music to the perfume, everything was to be crafted with skill and beauty.

The particular art form of song has a place in every level of the creation. The Bible speaks of the stars, the mountains and all the creatures singing. God himself is said to express his love and joy over his children with singing. And those who have been redeemed echo the words of Moses and the Israelites in response to God's salvation: "The Lord is my strength and my song (Exodus 15:2)."

Music is a language

"There is a universality to musical expression that overcomes race and language barriers," says Heron. People who do not understand each other's words can be moved in the same way by music. And this is a language that begins at a very young age. Every kid can sing a playground taunt, to the same tune, with almost perfect pitch.

According to Carl Merenick, Christian school music teacher, "Music evokes emotions. Playing ragtime makes us want to dance, sad music makes us feel tired, hard and driving music makes us want to run a race." And the emotional impact of a song can last a lifetime. The song that a teenager sings to get through the first heartbreak may be recalled years later in a situation of hurt and loss. Similarly, certain other sensory experiences such as sights or odors can evoke some long ago musical memory.

The same quality of music that touches our emotions can evoke a sense of awe and transcendence. Barb Quirie, Children's Ministry Director, notes that "music draws kids into the presence of God."

Music is a vehicle

Big companies pay big bucks for little jingles. With good reason. An up-beat tune creates a happy feeling in the listener that is subliminally associated with the product or service being advertised. The mood of the music also serves to reinforce the message of the lyrics.

Because of this, many different musical styles are appropriate in our lives and our churches. God's story includes passages of great victory and joy as well as moments of anguish. Redemption involves the pain of repentance and the liberation of forgiveness. The music that accompanies the lyrics as we tell these stories will either undermine or multiply the impact of the message. Which means, as Heron points out, that a hard rock genre can be used appropriately with a certain age group to tell of the ugly despair of rebellion and sin. But it does not tell the whole story.

Music as a vehicle that is traveling in the same direction as the words will drive the message home.

Music as teaching tool

On the day that God called Moses and Joshua into the tent of meeting to commission Joshua as Moses' successor, he gave the aging patriarch one last assignment — teaching a song to the people. God predicted the future infidelity of his people, and he chose music as the means to communicate the message of his mighty works on their behalf from generation to generation. The song would serve as a witness against them and an explanation to their descendants for their problems. In Deuteronomy 31:21,22, we read, "And when many disasters and difficulties come upon them, this song will testify against them, because it will not be forgotten by their descendants.... So Moses wrote down this song that day and taught it to the Israelites." God wanted his message passed on in song so that it would be remembered. Music works on memory in several ways.

One obvious advantage of using music with children is the repetition. We would never be able to tell the same Bible story again and again, but kids love to hear the same song over and over. Repeating the

lyrics, both at one sitting and over a period of weeks and months, locks them into long-term memory.

Recent research about varied learning styles or "multiple intelligences" gives powerful support to the effectiveness of music as a teaching tool. We are now told that there are at least seven ways to learn and that most children have strengths in one particular learning style (Garner, Howard, *Frames of Mind*; Tobias, Cynthia, *The Way They Learn*). The most effective way to teach a group (or an individual for that matter) is, therefore, to combine several learning experiences at once. Music does that.

The lyrics themselves will have the most impact on linguistic learners. This includes the people that respond well to what they hear as well as those who are more visually oriented and who benefit from seeing the words on a screen. Bodily kinesthetic learners (the movers) will learn from the actions. Interpersonal learners will respond to the interactive approach of the song leader. The logical-mathematical mind learns from the patterns, rhythms and sequencing inherent in music. The intrapersonal or introspective learner benefits from the time that music affords for meditation and reflection. And of course the musical learners — those who learn best through rhythm and pitch — are best served when life is one continuing concert.

The basic principles of education prove that we all learn what we see, hear and do. Good children's songs fulfill all of these criteria.

Music allows for response

Another built-in educational advantage of music is the opportunity for response. First of all, we sing back the verses, the stories and the theology that we are learning. There is personal involvement with the message. This, as we have shown, reinforces the meaning in our minds and emotions.

But this is input. Music also allows for output as we offer to God our very best with instrument and voice. The lyrics of praise and worship give us the opportunity to express our love and gratitude to the great God we sing about in these and other pieces. This makes music a means of two-way communication, lifting the singer beyond the group and the songleader to a dialogue with God.

The time that we spend with children in school, clubs and camps is a small but important percentage of their lives. Every minute counts. Experienced Christian educators believe that using some of that time to teach Christian truth thoughtfully and deliberately through music is an investment that will reap benefits for a lifetime.

Kathy, in a stalled elevator, would agree.

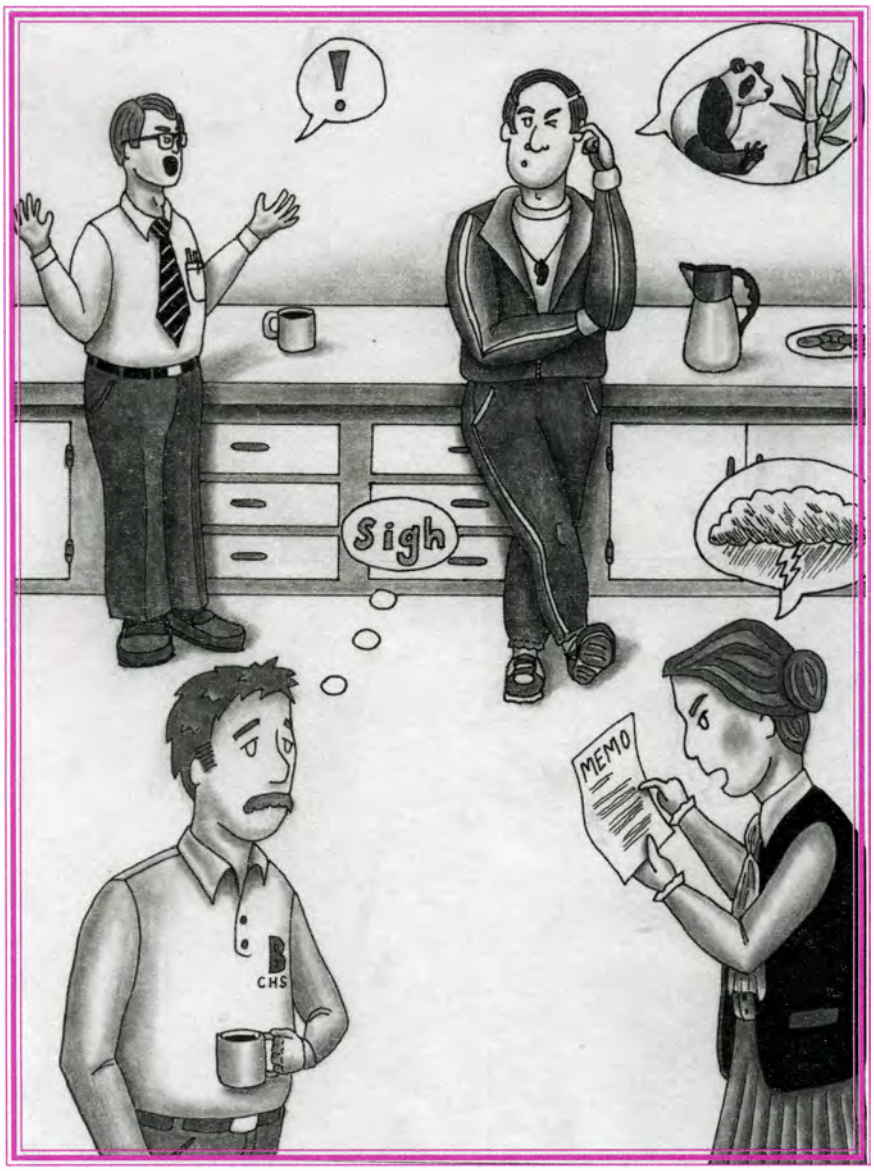
By helping us to relax, pace ourselves, focus, and clear our minds of distracting thoughts, music can help all of us — adults as well as children — more readily to memorize large amounts of information. Once we've acquired this information, musical elements such as tempo, melody, and rhythm make it easier for us later to retrieve and recognize not only the songs and their lyrics, but also the events and feelings that have become associated with the music." (John M. Ortiz, PhD, *Nurturing Your Child With Music,* Beyond Words Publishing Inc., Hillsboro, Oregon, 1999, p. XV.)

Slouching Toward Bedlam

You can lead a teacher to writing lessons plans, but you can't make him think.

by Jan Kaarsvlam

Jan Kaarsvlam is interviewing for a position teaching urban cartography at Daystar Christian School in downtown Chicago, Illinois. He looks forward to a change of venue after the unfortunate misunderstanding surrounding the "Shave the Cow" fundraiser at Heritage Christian School near Thief River Falls, Minnesota.



Carrie Wellema stomped into the faculty lounge at Bedlam Christian High School and slammed her pile of mail onto the table muttering, "This is the biggest load of...."

"Uh, uh, uh," Phys. Ed. teacher Rex Kane admonished while grabbing a cookie off the table. "As the old Chinese proverb says, 'When the Panda sneers at the bamboo, he may be sneering right back at himself.' Or, no, is it, 'When the Panda sneers at the bamboo, there's two more months of winter.'"

Carrie ignored Rex, who sat at the end of the table, puzzling out exactly what the Chinese proverb was. She had found through the years that any amount of thought directed toward understanding the connection between anything Rex said and the topic at hand inevitably led to a never-ending spiral of increasing confusion. She addressed the larger group, "Have you seen this memo?"

The memo she held in her hand was short and to the point. All teachers at Bedlam were being asked to submit weekly lesson plans to the new principal.

"Yeah. Unbelievable, huh?" Shop teacher Gordon Winkle, a big beef of a man, was the first to take up the issue. "I mean, VanderHaar's been here, what, two months? I can hear it already, 'Back in Kansas we always did it this way.'" Winkle paused to do a reasonable imitation of Bently VanderHaar's trademark thoughtful frown.

"I don't see what the big deal is," put in art teacher Gregg Mortis, "I mean how hard is it to drop off some plans for the next week with the boss before you head home on Friday?"

Here was irony. Mortis had a reputation among the faculty of Bedlam for not really teaching at all. He subscribed to a belief that students could best learn to draw by watching videos of other people drawing. If one could believe his students, 90 percent of his classroom duties revolved around pushing play and rewind. Yet he didn't see having to deliver lesson plans as a big deal.

"For you, Mortis, it probably isn't very hard at all," Winkle muttered under his breath. At least he thought it was under his breath, but Gregg shot him an angry look. "I mean, it's only art class, right? But for those of us who actually teach...." Winkle jabbed Gregg's ribs with his elbow just enough to let him know that he was only partly kidding. Mortis frowned and sunk into a quiet funk.

"None of you can even see what is happening here. This is

just the beginning; just wait until he gets going." Everyone turned to look at the librarian, John Kleinhut. Kleinhut was Bedlam's resident conspiracy theorist. He also had a protracted Adam's apple. The two combined in a unique way so that when he felt most put upon, his Adam's apple bobbed up and down like a walnut on a pogo stick. He paused, savoring the attention while he sipped coffee from his mug, then continued. "Soon we won't just be submitting these things so he can look at them; soon it will be part of our review policy. We'll get called into the office so that VanderHaar can give us his critique about what we can do to improve our teaching. Maybe talk to us about our delivery style or personal theology."

"Yeah," said Rex Kane, digging in his ear with his pinky, looking at the wax, and then flicking it away. "That's exactly the problem here. We start jumping when he says jump, and the next thing we know, we'll have to get approval from all the students. You know, submit the lesson plans to them maybe? Or maybe we should check with their parents before handing out an assignment? Maybe we need to check each family's vacation schedule, make sure our assignment isn't too much for them."

Despite the fact that Rex Kane never gave take-home assignments, he seemed to be working himself into a frenzy. Kleinhut took the floor again, pushing Kane's ideas a paranoid step further. The two egged one another on until finally Kleinhut's Adam's apple was pumping like a piston, and Rex was so upset he had even set aside his cookie.

Then Calvin VanderMeer spoke up. Vandermeer taught Freshmen, Junior, and Senior Bible and an elective sociology course, and was advisor for the debate team and the Chapel Committee, coached baseball, and helped build sets for the play. He was one of the oldest members of the faculty. His voice silenced the raging duo. "Actually, it was the Administrative Advisory Board's idea." He paused a moment while it sank in. Bedlam's AAB was a group of six teachers, elected by the faculty, who met with the principal once a month to make suggestions and iron out problems.

John Kleinhut jumped into the pause. "So you're in on this too. All of you, doing exactly what he wants. You're like a bunch of, um, what's the word for those puppets on strings? What are they called?"

"I think you mean silhouettes," said Rex.

Kleinhut stared at him a moment, then continued. "Why don't you people on the AAB wake up and smell the coffee? What, you want to give VanderHaar the chance to control our whole lives while you're at it."

"Yeah, why not put our names and addresses on the World Wide Web for every lunatic, mass marketer, animal trainer, or statistics expert to get hold of?" Rex Kane had a running technophobia that picked odd moments to surface.

Cal VanderMeer paused, waiting for the inevitable confusion following one of Rex's remarks to fade, then continued. "Well, to tell the truth, we figured it was for our own protection. You remember that incident last year when Mortis was showing those videos about Salvadore Dali...."

Wham! Mortis slammed his magazine on the table, rose from his seat, and stomped out of the room. Cal stared after him, perplexed, and then continued. "Anyway, he showed those videos and a parent tried to get him fired because she said it was new age stuff? At first, VanderHaar didn't know what to say. Part of the problem was bad communication. How is a principal supposed to explain things to parents if he doesn't know what we are teaching?"

Gordon Winkle stood up at the other end of the room. "He ought to have faith in his faculty. If he's got that, he'll have no trouble backing us, regardless of the situation." He folded his arms triumphantly across his chest.

Cal nodded. "Exactly, and that's what we're trying to do, give him confidence in us, so he can back us up as someone who knows what we do, rather than as a stranger. Besides, he is responsible for making sure we are teaching from a Christian perspective. How else is he supposed to know what goes on with us day to day?"

"Great idea," Gord said, "but is he really going to read 45 sets of lesson plans every week? Besides, this whole scheme just adds more to my workload. If I have to write out full lesson plans for the administration to read, I'll have another 3-4 hours of paperwork per week. And the kicker is, what I'm actually doing in class won't change a bit. Extra work with no educational benefit."

Carrie looked down at the table and muttered to Jane VanderAsh who was sitting next to her, "Why can't we agree to have a chat sometime in the summer? Or why doesn't he just come observe my class more often? A lesson plan for every class is going to leave me even less time to grade papers."

Jane snorted quietly. "I guess you haven't read the bottom of the memo then?"

Carrie looked down at the piece of paper on the table. At the bottom of the page was another little paragraph. "Teachers are also reminded to return all papers graded within a week's time."

The bell rang. Carrie thought of the 75 Bible compositions the students had turned in yesterday, the composer reports due tomorrow, and wondered how she was ever going to find the time.

Responding to Teacher Burnout —

by Ken Lodewyk

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Teaching can be a very isolating and stressful experience. Along with feeling isolated at work and encountering multiple sources of stress, teachers often have a high risk of burning out because they have high expectations and a strong desire to serve. Recent studies in certain school districts have reported burnout symptoms in as many as 30 to 40 percent of teachers (e.g., Huberman, 1993). Unfortunately, many teachers are unaware of these symptoms or keep their condition private, fearing that it implies personal failure. I have experienced various symptoms of burnout during my years as a teacher and have adapted to it in various ways, some healthy and others not. Through recovery I have discovered that although burnout can be attributed to many things, I must take primary responsibility for responding to my condition.

What is burnout?

Maslach and Jackson (1986) describe burnout as a chronic, dysfunctional state of emotional exhaustion (feelings of being emotionally overextended and depleted of one's resources), depersonalization (a negative, callous, or excessively detached response to other people), and reduced personal accomplishment (a decline in one's feelings of competence and successful achievement). Other symptoms can include physical exhaustion, anxiety, sadness, hopelessness, lowered self-esteem, withdrawal, guilt, deteriorating physical health, irritability, negativism, insomnia, over-concern with self, marital and family problems, and, in more extreme cases, suicide, depression, and increased use of alcohol and drugs.

Although any "unmanaged" acute or chronic stress can advance burnout, important contributors to burnout are generally consolidated into dynamics within the individual, organization, and community. Beginning teachers seem to be most at risk. Several studies have revealed that burnout is most prevalent early (first two years) and halfway through a teaching career (ages 30 to 45) (e.g., Huberman, 1993) and is most common in men and in middle school teachers (e.g., Becker, 1993). Olson and Rodman (1988) reported that about 40-50 percent of teachers in their study dropped out of teaching within the first five years (cf. Gold and Roth, 1993).

Experiencing feelings of disillusionment and inconsequentiality, the feeling that one's work or oneself are unimportant, often triggers burnout in teachers (Farber, 1991). Such a feeling of alienation can be fostered within certain organizations. Organizational factors like effectiveness in administering school discipline, general working conditions, styles of leadership, school ethos, opportunities for professional growth, incentives, and having assigned roles that match teachers' gifts — all these influence teacher well-being and performance. Emotionally demanding and divisive interpersonal relationships between teachers, students, and colleagues can also foster burnout; hence workers in the human service professions report the highest levels of burnout.

Teacher burnout is not just another job phenomenon. Community values influence personal attitudes and behaviors and, therefore, affect one's susceptibility to burnout. For instance, teachers in many school communities work under ever-present fiscal limitations, excessive parental demands, and strong pressures to meet external standards. On a broader scale, the isolationist culture in much of North America seems to advocate escapism and a form of narcissistic self-centeredness as an antidote to pain and suffering. Each of these can hinder teacher morale and coping behaviors.

While certain dynamics within the organization and community are major contributors to burnout in teachers, it is beyond the scope of this analysis to investigate these more closely. Without negating the importance of these, I have chosen instead to emphasize the responsibility of the individual teacher in responding to his or her burnout.

Responding to burnout

It has been argued that burnout in teachers is not necessarily a destructive experience but can be a temporary, forward-looking, purposeful and helpful response to fatigue from pursuing appropriate goals. As such, burnout is seen as "a preparation for a way of living and working which will be better than the one that preceded it." (Maher, 1989, p.34) It is realistic to assume that as teachers, we will all experience varying degrees of burnout based on our personal dispositions, context, and the nature of the work we do. However, as burnout symptoms accumulate, our longterm adaptation process usually becomes more destructive as we increasingly retreat from reality. This can lead to a deterioration in work quality, satisfaction, attendance, morale, and, eventually, to depression. Our condition makes it more difficult for us to operate from real motives and identities, can suffocate "graceful" spirits, and prompts us and others to be less than we are capable of (see James 1:13-15). In short, the effects of burnout impede our personal health and vitality, and are most evident in how they limit our willingness and capacity to foster community by enjoying, serving and loving God amid others. Although there are unique

Who's Responsible?

needs in each individual's healing journey, applying the following suggestions may serve to prevent and heal burnout in some teachers.

Examine motives and identity

Since our motives are rooted in our spiritual convictions, the concept of burnout is "spiritually saturated." As Christians, we believe our faith in God needs to determine our motives and actions. Unfortunately, in our broken state, we often fail to motivate ourselves from this source. Richard Rohr and Joseph Martos (1996) suggest five messages they feel are crucial to accept about oneself: (1) Life is hard; (2) You are going to die; (3) You are not that important; (4) You are not in control; and, (5) Your life is not about you (p. xxix). Messages like these can often point us to a more accurate understanding of our existence. If the source of our identity and purpose is truly rooted in God, we allow God to empower us with his Spirit, who exposes and sheds our "false" identity and helps us operate from our "real" self. Regularly in his spirit, we are more aware and equipped to regulate appropriate boundaries for our well-being.

In attempting to prevent burnout, teachers need not necessarily retreat from the pursuit of excellence or from formidable challenges. Burnout is evident in both over- and under-committed individuals. As such, it is not so much a problem of commitment as one of motive. We often strive subconsciously to meet deep and unmet emotional needs for appreciation and self-esteem through our work. Too often our sense of worth becomes dependent on performance. Straining for equality, reward and status within an organization can deplete us of our emotional resources, the core symptom of burnout. Such actions often reflect a highly-driven personality, self-serving motive, and an over-emphasis on controlling external conditions. Giving our best effort can be a godly virtue. However, when the pursuit of excellence becomes the chief motive for such an effort, and is used to fulfill our ego needs or our quest for meaning, we often become over-involved and work becomes our idol. In reality, our worth rests unchanging in God regardless of our performance at work or any other area.

Accept personal responsibility

Healing can be painful. A major obstacle to healing is being unwilling to admit our state or acceptresponsibility for managing it. Despite our external sources of stress (e.g., relational strife, pupil misbehavior), our perceptions of these stresses and any resulting feelings often signal our own deeper issues (e.g., fear, anger, loneliness, distrust, hate). The key to our prevention and recovery is being willing to invite the Holy Spirit to humble us, enable us to become more aware of our condition, and prompt us to make necessary changes however painful. This does not mean dehumanizing ourselves shamefully. It involves attaining greater self-awareness of, and liberation from, our state of bondage and accepting joy and freedom in Christ. Subsequent responsibilities and interventions will be more effective within this consciousness and freedom.

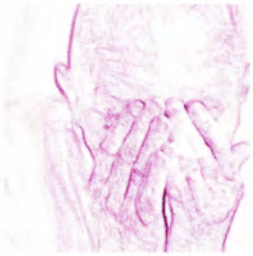
Solitude and interactions

Since regular communication with God enhances our well-being, much of our counsel should be sought through activities like prayer, Bible reading and memory work, meditation, singing, solitude, and interactions with nature. This can include regular communion with our bodies (e.g., exercise, nutrition, leisure), the environment (plants, animals) and people to help us eliminate distractions and reacquaint us with the reality of our existence. Henri Nouwen (1994) notes that after solitude, involvement in and dependence on community is the most important source of nurture enabling us to serve out of love. He notes that it is the very activities we often assume are a "waste of time" that may be the most beneficial to our overall well-being and vitality. Establishing this as a pattern or process is important because there is no "quick fix" to burnout.

When we struggle with burnout we also need to be able to ask for, and accept, help. Instead, we often repress our needs and alienate ourselves from or ignore key sources of healing. Finding safe people (mentor, counselor) within a trustworthy and caring community can give us a more objective assessment and valuable recommendations for recovery. For example, a vocational counselor may help to clarify if a chosen career, role, or goal truly matches our interests, abilities, and values. If applicable, seek professional growth, adapt or try a new role, learn conflict management skills, set more realistic goals, be graceful to yourself and others, and balance commitments more effectively. Reading certain "self-help" books can also be a source of enlightenment if they do not encourage us to retreat into excessive self-introspection.

Assert changes appropriately

Teachers can live in a spirit of bitterness or grace. Both are potent forces, arise from divergent sources, and bring about different results. We know that any context will bring suffering from injustice, conflict, and organizational flaws. It seems that suffering is one way God fosters change in us. Nouwen (1994) uses the analogy of a



"The main responsibility rests with each teacher."

farmer tilling soil to enable it to receive nourishment to explain how suffering can make us vulnerable to becoming aware of and accepting truth. Unfortunately, many of us resist any "tilling," react bitterly to challenges, and become callous and angry. The healthy alternative is to respond graciously by accepting our circumstances, admitting our faults, being prayerful and grateful, and using appropriate channels and a Godly spirit to express legitimate concerns. This does not absolve others of fault. Instead, it frees us as we trust completely in God's timing, authority, and justice.

Our leaders and colleagues need encouragement and prayer to grow as authentic servants who model professionalism, integrity, and well-being. They need to demonstrate discernment in adapting to serve those within the organization with needs for safety, identity, belonging, empowerment, meaningfulness, and risking. Effective work communities cooperate in supportive teams that offer physical and emotional support, healthy communication, and enhanced self-awareness. Constructive activities like worship, discussion and play facilitate such community building and shared vision.

Rediscover celebration of life

We often place too many conditions on experiencing joy. The stresses of life often suffocate our capacity to "be" in the enjoyment of life. I am reminded of this when I look up into the sky. After a day or more absorbed in the affairs of my life, a timely glance into the sky often helps me to see beyond my own narrow conception of reality and all of its perceived stresses. So too does a thought of the friends I had as a youngster growing up in Nigeria who, despite having so much less materially, radiated a special inner joy. Celebrating life means we need to, as C.S. Lewis suggests, seek contentment from our inner joy in Christ, in his gifts to us, and in serving others rather than through pursuing constant happiness from outer sources. Thus, our work will be inspired by our joy in Christ. Striving for happiness conditional upon the values of our culture may signal that we are too bonded to the carnal life instead of to our reliance on God. The finite and self-serving nature of such motives may stimulate chronic burnout.

As teachers, we often rely on our own strength and on the thrill of "success" rather than on relating with and honoring Christ through the working process. Matthew 11:29-30 states: "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my load is light." As we commune with Christ, we learn how wise it is to take his yoke upon us instead of trying to carry our burden alone. Our awareness of this gift may be our greatest asset. We pursue the excellence He wills, first of all, by dwelling in him. He enjoys our company! The scene is then set for truly meaningful and fruitful performance.

Since burnout can have a potent influence on the individual and the school community, it is a condition worth monitoring and responding to proactively. We usually have more power to gain control over our environments than we realize, especially if our motives, identity, and patterns are rooted in truth and inspired by the Holy Spirit. Although community and organizational dynamics are also important in preventing and healing burnout and should be looked at more closely, the main responsibility rests with each teacher. It took some suffering to awaken me to more of that reality. May God bless you as you discern and respond to your own unique challenges.

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Panel Dot Edu

"Can a post-modern perspective serve as a catalyst?"


Clarence Joldersma

Clarence Joldersma (cjolders@calvin.edu), assistant professor of education at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich., has asked a panel the question: "Can a post-modern perspective serve as a catalyst for our Christian schools to be revitalized and become more truly first-century Christ-like and Christ-centered?" Discussion came quickly and forcefully. It didn't follow a linear path, which is a mark of post-modernity, and never really ended or resolved itself for, perhaps appropriately, it ended with a question, another mark of post-modernity. The panel usually consists of:

Pam Adams (padams@dordt.edu), assistant professor of education at Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa.
Lois Brink (LBrink@grcs.org), curriculum coordinator and media director at Grand Rapids Christian High School, Grand Rapids, Mich.
Johanna Campbell (ctabc@twu.ca), executive director of the Christian Teachers Association of British Columbia, Langley, B.C.
Tim Hoeksema (thoeksema@hollandchristian.org), the principal of Holland Christian High School, Holland, Mich.
Tony Kamphuis (TonyKamp@aol.com), history and business teacher at Smithville District Christian High School, Smithville, Ont.

"Can a post-modern perspective serve as a catalyst for our Christian schools to be revitalized and become more truly first-century Christ-like and Christ-centered?"

Johanna Campbell responds:


Johanna Campbell

I certainly think so, having just recently read Robert Webber's *Ancient-Future Faith*. In his book, he explores all the post-modern phenomena and shows how the tenets of the first-century church can answer to each of those situations as in, for example, the phenomenon of despair in our post-modern culture. Christians in the first-century church had a living, vibrant faith, and they were constantly drawing in non-believers because of their joy and radiance. We can do the same because we have the same Holy Spirit. Then there is the search for spirituality. We can show our students that there are spiritual disciplines that draw us closer to God. Another example would be the desire of modern man to belong — we have a living, vibrant Christian community that bears one another's burdens. Wouldn't you like to belong to that? And you can still join any "lifestyle enclave" you want, using the words of Stanley Grentz. Webber discusses each of the post-modern emphases to show that the early Church had the answer. We need to model the Christ-like life style of the early church so that our students will desire to belong to Christ. Our God is an awesome God! Who would not want to serve HIM? We do not need to live in despair. There is abundant life, eternal life and it begins now! No wonder Paul breaks out in doxologies time and again!

Tony Kamphuis responds to Johanna:


Tony Kamphuis

How much of this could be said with as much accuracy about Buddhist monks as it is of Christians? A sense of belonging, an openness to spirituality, an answer to despair. And can you find any group that displays more clearly a sense of contentedness? Post-modernism may open up some opportunities, but any positive effect on our schools will have to come from a different angle. Certainly schools that grow out of a Reformed view should have a great response to the fragmentation of this post-modern world.

Lois Brink responds to Clarence:


Lois Brink

Post-modernism? You mean individualism, fragmentation, emphasis on the immediate, experiential, relativism, pluralism, materialism, isolation, importance of appearances, random freedoms?

The more I hear about post-modernism, the more I think of pre-modern times, modernism even! These unhealthy characteristics are not unique to our times, are they? It seems to me that these reflect the human condition throughout our history.

I wonder if reflection about this might serve as a catalyst towards a balance of these extremes and the extreme reactions of the Celtic ascetics, the monastic tradition, the Mennonite life style, even the reaction of my Dutch and immigrant forebears. Get out. Pull up. Go away ... to western Michigan and eastern Canada.

Perhaps we can learn together to balance our world and life view through a gradual change rather than a strong reaction. Do we need a catalyst such as reflection to activate a reaction?

How does this impact us school people? We are struggling to

re-interpret, re-articulate how our Reformed Christian perspective speaks to this "post-modern" culture. Should there be more reflection on each of these characteristics in our times? Should there be a transformational reaction towards shalom, community, volunteer simplicity? What is appropriate for K-6? Middle school students? high school students? How transformational should we be in an educational setting?

Lotsa questions.

Pam Adams responds to Clarence:

Pam Adams

Yes, post-modernism can serve as a catalyst for revitalization of our Christian schools. First, post-modernists, if they are true to their word, encourage and even celebrate alternative points of view. Having an open forum will allow the public to hear and perhaps understand the basis for Christian education. While organizations such as the National Education Association have a strong political voice, much more is said today in the media about alternative schools than in the past. Some of this has to do with the failure of public education in some parts of North America, but I believe some of this also comes from a post-modern way of thinking. If more people hear about the message of Christian education, I suspect that more parents will choose Christian education. This hopefully will bring in parents from "outside" the usual Christian school community. These "outsiders" who are choosing Christian education for the first time are usually enthusiastic and often bring new ways of thinking. This type of infusion has revitalized Christian schools in many areas.

Secondly, post-modernism can act as a catalyst because parents see this philosophy becoming part and parcel of the public schools. As a result, Christian schools stand in sharper contrast. Of course this contrast has always been there, but, for many years, some people saw public schools as being the "Protestant" schools. As a child I attended Catholic schools and my teachers and parents referred to the public schools as the schools where the Protestants went. Well, public schools are rarely seen that way anymore. The modern attempt to be "religiously neutral" or to represent all opinions helps to highlight how Christian schools are different. However, this will not happen without great efforts on our part to show the world that our schools are places where beliefs and values are based on the Bible rather than on public opinion polls. Of course, how we live and how our students behave is a further testimony to the blessings that come from faithfulness.

Lois Brink responds to Pam:

Lois Brink

What you say about post-modernism — showing up Christian schools as a viable alternative for other Christians — suggests that this is a catalyst that allows our schools to embrace other Christ-followers, regardless of their particular bent. I think our Reformed perspective on stewardship, cultural discrimination, and social servant and justice issues can also be shared within our school settings. Our Reformed perspective may serve as a reminder that early Christians as well as latter-day Christians see themselves placed within their culture in order to serve and reclaim it.

Tony Kamphuis responds to Pam:

Tony Kamphuis

I agree with you that some of the more strident expressions of post-modernism may cause Christians of non-Reformed background to give our schools a second look, but that look may not reveal the sort of wholesale rejection of post-modernism they might expect. At least I hope it doesn't. The helpful aspects of post-modernism include the acknowledgment that all human knowledge is finite, tentative and perspective-bound. This resonates well with what Christian school supporters have said all along. We need Christian schools, because the perspective out of which we view the world shapes what we look at and the way we see it. The sensitivity to others and the openness to seeking justice, too, are encouraged by post-modernism, at least where it doesn't lapse into a "none of us know the truth, so what difference does it make anyway" attitude. But how should we balance these positive aspects with the positive aspects of an older approach that led to greater rootedness, a sense of security and a solid foundation from which to act in a world that can at times feel jelly-like?

Hilarious Grace

by Debbie Womelsduff

Debbie Womelsduff teaches at Shoreline Christian School in Shoreline, Washington. The article, an excerpt of a paper written at Seattle Bible College, gives a glimpse into her journey that led to her changing to a CSI school.

When I ponder God's grace, my first response is always one of hilarity. I was an enemy of God and now he adopts me as his child. What a great irony! My father illustrated this shortly after we moved into a new home in Sierra Vista, Arizona. Our last name was Marchant, which prompted some of the neighbor kids to mispronounce it "Martian." One night they were parading up and down the sidewalk in front of our house, fingers pointing up at the back of their heads like antennae, calling, "Bleep, bleep." My siblings and I were mortified, but my father did an unforgettable thing. He flung open the door, and instead of giving them the tongue-lashing they deserved (and which we knew he was capable of giving), he shouted, "Hey, you kids! Do you want some ice cream?" The kids, poised to run, stopped dead in their tracks, and one by one walked up the driveway for the undeserved gift. They expected to be reported to their parents, to be chewed out, maybe even to be chased, but they got ice cream instead. I bet they thought that was pretty hilarious. They never gave us trouble again. Grace succeeded where punishment could not.

Many Christians have never allowed themselves to be hilarious. They place a greater weight on themselves than God does. They suspect those who smile, enjoy life, wear bright colors, or spend money on themselves. They look for wrong in themselves, and worse, in others as well. They see deviance from an external set of standards as requiring suspicion of the genuineness of another's faith. In the denomination in which my husband and I grew up, adherence to unbiblical (dare I say Pharisaical?) unwritten rules on acceptable attire, especially on Sundays, dancing, drinking, vacationing over a weekend, attendance at Wednesday night service, and many other forms of behavior, determined one's devotion to God. Tongue-in-cheek, we called this condition, "saved but still guilty."

Fail boldly

When I teach my speech class how to use their voice, gestures, platform movement, and facial expressions in order to contribute to their ability to communicate the message, many students are worried about looking foolish before they have mastered those sub-parts of speaking into a natural-looking, unified whole. After assuring them of my "grace" as they learn, I tell them, "If you're going to fail, fail big! Fail with confidence! Don't flutter a tiny little penguin wave down at your side when you can look fully ridiculous with a big movement that everyone can see." My point, of course, is *not* that I wish them to fail or to look silly. But I wish them to have *the freedom* to fail while they learn how to put it all together. We might even chuckle once in a while, but I appreciate them more for their attempts than for the fear of attempting something so frightening to a novice speaker.

Perhaps this is what Martin Luther meant when he said, "Sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ more boldly still."[1] Although his own life was hugely imperfect (his temper tantrums and his insults were legendary, according to Sproul [2]), he understood that grace frees us to "work out [our] salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12, NASB) without fear of incurring God's wrath while we do so.

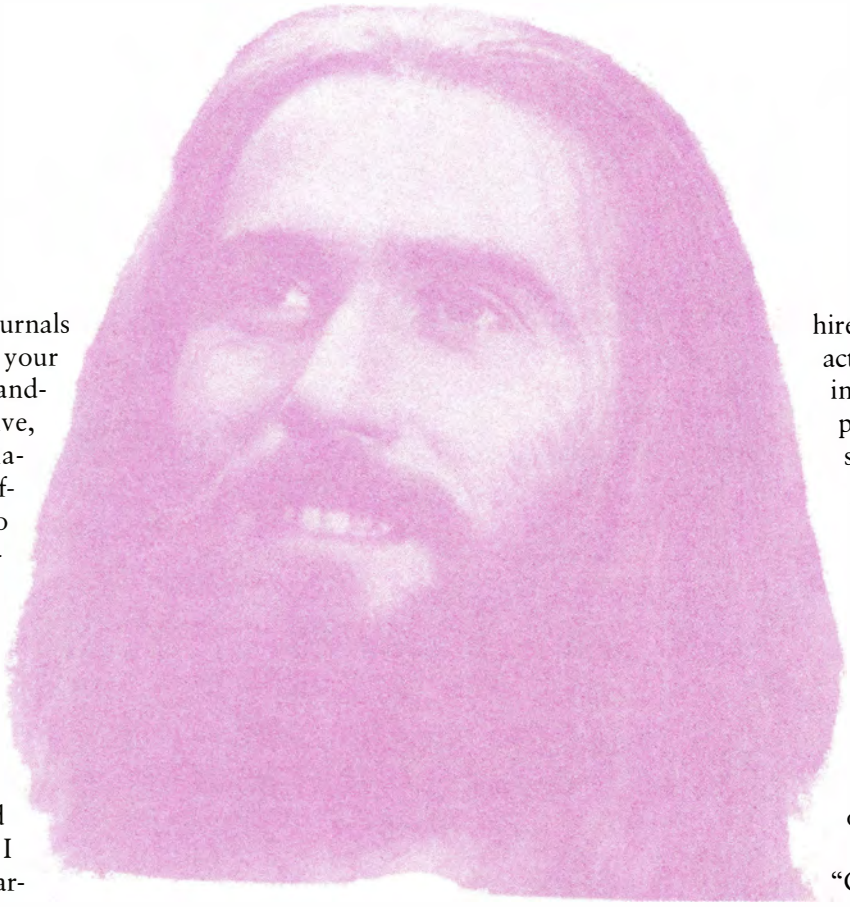
Legalistic rules

When it comes to applying these principles of grace to our schools, how shall we as educators then live? How can a proper understanding of grace infiltrate our schools, our policies, our rules, our high expectations, our relationships with each other and with our students? Perhaps I will raise more questions than I will answer here, but the danger of overlooking what God has said about himself and grace, even in the environment of a school, is too great.

The opposite of grace is not sin, but legalism, and Christian schools in general are bastions of legalism. The rules of most Christian schools and colleges are seldom even thoroughly rooted in the Bible, and many are based on out-of-context passages, displaying at best poor exegesis. [3] Jesus' harshest words were for the Pharisees who "devoted their lives to following God, gave away an exact tithe, obeyed every minute law in the Torah ... sent out missionaries to gain new converts held firm to traditional values ... [and were] rarely involved in sexual sin or violent crime." In fact, they were "model citizens" (Yancy p. 196). Jesus shreds their dignity and accuses them of the folly of holding to the letter of the law when their hearts "are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness" (Matthew 23:27). Jesus minces no words, spares no feelings, allows no, "I'm sure you meant well." Are we guilty of judging one another by the same standard that the Pharisees used?

Fewest rules

Recently I asked my junior high stu-



dents to respond in their journals to the question, "What are your dreams for this school?" A handful of students wrote positive, godly things, but the vast majority, including some class officers and those considered to be "good kids," wrote something like, "My dream is that this school would burn to the ground and we could go to public school and avoid all these stupid rules." Even allowing for my students' immaturity and the natural inclination of youth to avoid discipline, I was shocked. I know some of these kids' parents, and I know they were not raised to hate authority. Yet why would so many have a reaction like that?

The real motivator of correct behavior is knowing God, being drawn into an upward spiral of behavior and joy that is a reflection of the living God in our hearts. I propose that Christian schools begin deliberately rewriting their rules and expectations with the goal of drawing all students to knowledge, not just saving knowledge, nor even knowledge *about* God, but intimate, joy-filled knowledge of God so that his character, and not our graceless rules, can inform their characters and fill their hearts.

I propose that the fewest rules necessary to promote knowledge of God, safety, and academics (through which knowledge of God should also come) be implemented. For instance (and this is only a sample of issues which may need to be addressed):

— Instead of gracelessly dictating a skirt length and a hair length, always an arbitrary standard, call students to modesty and concern for others. Granted, it takes less work to measure a skirt than it does to hold a girl's hands, look her in the eye, and say, "I'm concerned about why you feel the need to attract a boy's attention with your body," or to ask a boy why he chooses to identify through his clothes or hairstyle with a particular godless subculture.

Alternatives

— Instead of granting mercy where there has been no repentance, insist that students who indulge in self-destructive or others-destructive behavior (drugs, drunkenness, refusal to do homework, tardiness, sexual activity) without genuine repentance, without "empty hands to receive grace," without intention to ask forgiveness, be asked to leave the school. The question is not one of abandoning the student but of understanding that God can work in the student's life apart from this one school. In other words, allow the rich young ruler to walk away.

— Instead of having a code of behavior for teachers and staff so long and detailed that no one can master it (and therefore engendering disrespect for the rules), hire teachers of proven character and acceptable teaching ability, set broad expectations (academic and spiritual excellence, appropriate dress), trust them to do their jobs, and compensate them appropriately. The evaluation process of teachers should be one that encourages growth, excellence, and improvement, not one that looks for fault or inspires fear.

— Instead of creating "Christian bubbles" where our children are safe from persecution, teach them to meet the world head-on and gracefully challenge its assumptions. The goal of all school programs — academics, athletics, and arts — should be to create bridges to minister to a broken and needy world. This might mean participating in the public school music festivals instead of the Christian school festival. In one school where I worked, it meant that the varsity basketball team met for Bible study before every game and invited the other team to join them, and the cheerleaders provided refreshments and a hospitality suite to the visiting cheerleaders. It means a focus on excellence, but not a focus on winning.

In general, it should mean the fewest rules for the greatest gain. It should mean more reliance on biblical values and godly example, and less reliance on Pharisaical, extra-biblical requirements.

Rationalizations

It has been argued that the reason most schools have so many rules is that it is impractical to treat every situation individually. (The same argument is used for

church discipline because the guidelines in the Bible are difficult to enact. But we ignore them at the church's peril!) I maintain that the only common sense way to handle individual situations is by principle, not by rule. I have seen girls who fit the legalistic requirements of the dress code but were dressed more provocatively than another whose skirt was an inch above code. I have seen a boy in a shirt and tie (a standard for chapel day I still do not understand biblically) whose poor attitude about worship was dragging weaker kids down with it.

If we are serious about biblical principles, we must apply them even when it is difficult. We must never let a student graduate from our schools with the idea that if all our external requirements are met, then he or she must be a mature Christian. "The proof of spiritual maturity is not how 'pure' you are but awareness of your impurity. That very awareness opens the door to grace" (Yancey p. 198). Likewise "[the] mature Christians I have met along the way are those who have failed and have learned to live gracefully with their failure. Faithfulness requires the courage to risk everything on Jesus ... the readiness to risk failure." [4]

Another justification for the somewhat arbitrary rules of many Christian schools is that the student must learn to submit to authority. And yet I must agree with Gene Edwards when he says, "Rules were invented by elders, so they could get to bed early.... Men who harp on authority only prove they have none. And kings who make speeches about submission only betray twin fears in their hearts: They are not certain they are really true leaders, sent of God. *And* they live in mortal fear of a rebellion." [5] We must not live in fear of rebellion, because the mini-kingdom of our school is only "ours" for as long as God allows. In our implementation of our duties, we must be obedient to God's principles first. I find that most of the rules are written to please a certain group of parents, certain vocal board members, or perhaps even the community. We rarely make pleasing God our first priority, and, even when we do, we have a misguided notion of what pleases him. The life of a leader commissioned of God is one of submission to God (Edwards p. 47), not first of submission to other men because eventually those two ideals will come into conflict. Whom will we obey? In choosing to submit to God, "we can't lose because we have nothing to lose!" (Manning p. 192)

Grace is both the easy way and the hard way. It is so much easier to accept God's grace with empty hands than to cling to what was never ours in the first place and try to succeed on our own. It is harder to approach others with grace than with a list of rules, but I find no biblical precedent for requiring more than God requires. Grace is undeserved and cannot be repaid. We, those around us, our students, even our world would be different if we truly acted on the principles of receiving and bestowing hilarious grace.

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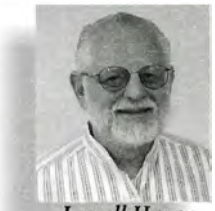
Media Eye

Theology and Ideology: Bad for the Arts



Lowell Hagan
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Lowell Hagan is a history teacher at Bellevue Christian High School, Clyde Hill, Washington. This year, he teaches drama and psychology and is writing down the school's philosophy of education for future teachers.

The release of the film version of *Left Behind*, based on Tim LaHaye's popular novel of the same name, might prove to some that bad theology makes bad art. Unfortunately for this theory, so does good theology.

The fact is that when art becomes preaching, it ceases to be art. It does not matter whether the preaching has anything to do with what people commonly call religion. Proponents of political ideologies are as likely as anyone to try to convert people through literature.

George Bernard Shaw, for example, was an excellent writer with a sharp wit and a keen sense of social outrage, but his plays become almost terminally boring when he decides to bludgeon the audience with concepts of Fabian socialism. Upton Sinclair wrote *The Jungle* in an attempt to promote socialism, but it was the story that gripped his audience, and his ideological message was ignored.

The novels of Ayn Rand appeal only to those who espouse her philosophy of totally selfish individualism, and for the same reason that Christian novels appeal only to Christians. The appeal is not in the story, but in the advocacy of a view of life. Rand never found a story line that she wasn't willing to bury under page after mind-numbing page of philosophical speculation.

Don't try to convert

Professional story-tellers who should know better often fall into the same trap when they get on an ideological bandwagon. When Stanley Kramer made the film version of Nevil Shute's novel *On the Beach*, he was entirely too anxious to convert the audience to his point of view. Rather than just telling the story and letting them make up their own minds, he decided to rub the viewers' noses in the message. Near the end of the film the camera creates a montage of scenes of deserted streets. The last shot in the sequence shows an empty speaker's platform where a rally had been held in the last days. The camera cuts to a close-up of a large banner that reads, "There Is Still Time ... Brother." A cue for derisive laughter.

As much as I love John Irving's novel *A Prayer For Owen Meany*, and captivated as I was by the narrator's page one declaration, "I am a Christian because of Owen Meany," honesty compels me to say that he does sorely try the reader's patience by allowing his characters to bluster and grumble about some of his own pet political peeves. This is one novel that could be improved by trimming about 50 pages. But on the positive side, Irving allows his characters to live out their somewhat unorthodox Christianity. He allows faith to be faith, and does not press the point with the reader. The novel never preaches, but if Owen Meany were not a Christian, there would be no story.

Objectives differ

When I say that art, literature, drama cease to be art when they begin to preach, I do not mean that to imply that good art cannot express a theological or ideological point of view. If John Calvin was right that our beliefs are the spectacles through which we view reality, then all of our thinking, including our artistic expression, is bound to embody a belief system in some way, sometimes in a very overt way as in Owen Meany. But art is not a good vehicle for evangelism.

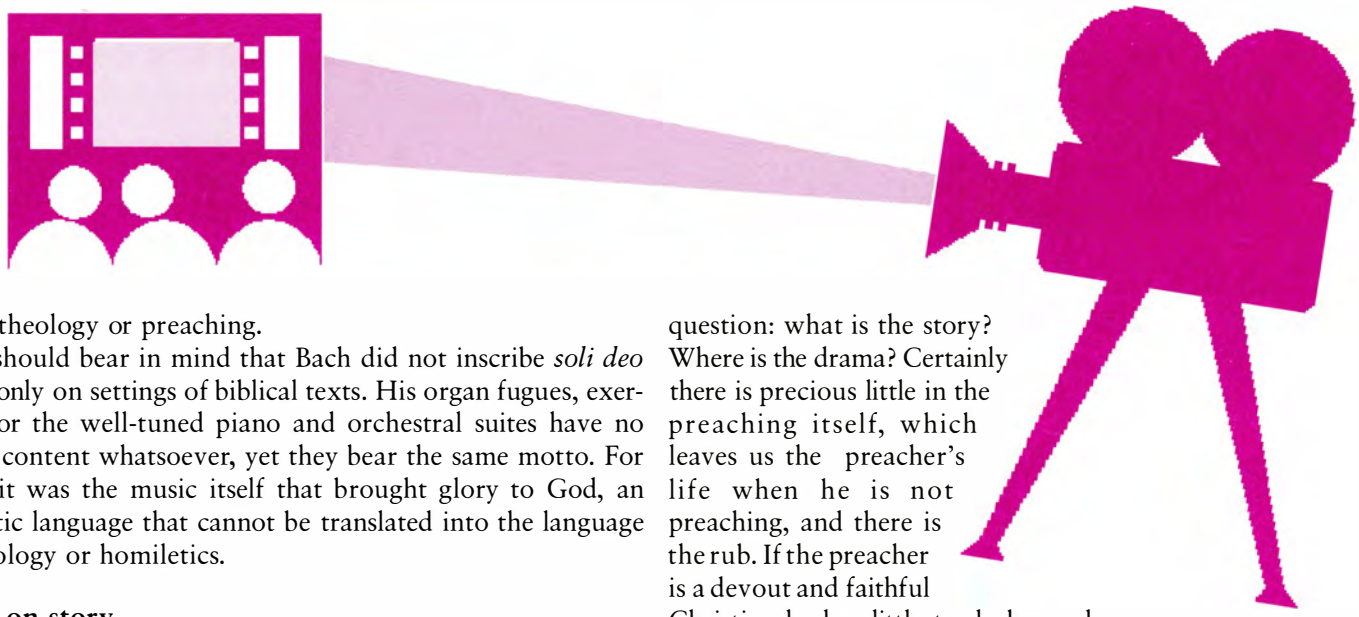
Why not? Because art and evangelism do not share a common purpose. Art opens our eyes to new ways of seeing the world. Evangelism seeks to change our very belief system. When asked what one of her poems meant, Marianne Moore once answered, "A poem should not mean; a poem should be." We can see the validity of his position. If the first thing we do to a poem is tear it apart looking for meaning, we destroy it.

This, of course, is precisely where so many high school and college English classes have it exactly wrong. So much time is spent analyzing literature for obscure meanings that the joy of experiencing literature is squelched. Small wonder that once they no longer have to take exams, many people never read another book. Art has been destroyed for the sake of feeding the intellect.

Need for tension

Drama is a particularly poor vehicle for Christian evangelism. The essence of drama is conflict. The Christian gospel is a message, not of conflict, but of healing. There is, however, a dramatic tension inherent in the telling of the story itself. The secret of the success of *Godspell* lies precisely in the fact that it does not evangelize. It merely re-tells much of the narrative of the Mark's Gospel, which itself consists largely of stories that are not explained or analyzed.

The point is equally valid for music and the visual arts. Some may in rebuttal refer to Handel's *Messiah*, Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* and Michelangelo's *The Last Supper*. Do they not represent both good theology and the highest artistic achievement? Of course they do, but the point is that though they may have theological content, they do not attempt to usurp the role of



either theology or preaching.

We should bear in mind that Bach did not inscribe *soli deo gloria* only on settings of biblical texts. His organ fugues, exercises for the well-tuned piano and orchestral suites have no verbal content whatsoever, yet they bear the same motto. For Bach, it was the music itself that brought glory to God, an aesthetic language that cannot be translated into the language of theology or homiletics.

Focus on story

Michelangelo's visual art comes even closer to the point being made about literature and drama. What is it that is so arresting about *The Last Supper*? It is the artist's insight into the personalities of the disciples, caught as they are in the moment when Jesus reveals that one of their number will betray him. In his *Pietà*, Michelangelo captures the anguish of a mother cradling the body of her executed son. In both cases it is the human drama, not the theological content, that still captures our attention across the gap of five hundred years. One does not have to be a Christian to admire a Bach chorale. But if one is a Christian, the work takes on a depth of meaning it will never have for the nonbeliever.

In literature, it is the story, not the explaining of the story, that is the central thing. This point was driven home to me a number of years ago when I had the privilege of re-telling the New Testament narrative for children in *Theirs is the Kingdom*. Our aim was to do as little preaching as possible, and to let the stories themselves be their own explanation, because that is what the biblical text does. Jesus was a great story-teller. His disciples experienced considerable frustration at his reluctance to explain the stories.

The preacher's life

One way to legitimately get preaching into a story is to write a story about a preacher. Anything else immediately rings false. This was the problem with most of the early attempts at Christian movie-making. One abysmally bad example was *The Restless Ones,* in which nearly half an hour consisted of reaction shots of two people in the press box watching a Billy Graham crusade. This may have been Christian film-making, but it was basically dishonest. The story line was only an excuse to put an evangelistic sermon on film. The same could be said for *Left Behind*. The ostensible story of the film was only a frame to surround a theological point, the so-called "secret rapture of the church."

Attempts to write novels, plays or movies about preachers (or politicians or philosophers) immediately confront a basic question: what is the story? Where is the drama? Certainly there is precious little in the preaching itself, which leaves us the preacher's life when he is not preaching, and there is the rub. If the preacher is a devout and faithful Christian he has little to do beyond offering comfort to the afflicted, encouragement to the struggling, and spiritual food to the hungry. This may be what preachers are supposed to do, but as literature it soon becomes insufferably boring. Spice up the story with a few miracles, and your book is banished to the fantasy category. Make your preacher a flawed man with struggles of his own and you may have a better story, but the people who want everything to be smooth and untroubled will organize a boycott.

Conflict brings excitement

There have been several attempts to create a television dramatic series with a preacher as the central character, most recently *Seventh Heaven*. All of them have suffered from this problem. If the preacher consistently exhibits what we might call the Christian virtues, he becomes boring. This does not mean that people of faith are boring in real life, but they do not create very much dramatic tension, and thus don't work very well on stage, in movies or on television.

The kind of flawed, struggling, sinful men that often cause pious audiences to walk away make some of the most memorable preachers in dramatic literature. Who can forget Nathaniel Hawthorne's tortured Arthur Dimmesdale, or Sinclair Lewis' wicked Elmer Gantry? On film it is hard to find a more memorable preacher than Robert Duvall in *The Apostle*. I know of only one decent play about a preacher, *A Man Called Peter* (Peter Marshall). But it isn't very good, principally because not much actually happens. Again, without conflict, there isn't much of a story.

Conflict is so much a part of human life that life is almost unimaginable without it. What kind of literature we shall write in new Jerusalem I cannot conceive. But in the present we are sinners, redeemed but sinners still, living in a sinful world, and from this reality comes more than enough conflict to fuel artistic imagination. Part of our task as Christian educators is to help students learn the language of artistic expression without substituting the language of theology.

Impromptu Outburst

by Christine de Boer

Christine de Boer (brucdebo@eonoreo.on.ca) teaches at London Parental Christian School in London, Ont.

One of the best games my first-grade students ever played in the gym is "Race Around the Sun" in which one child stands in the center of the gym while two opposing teams race in opposite directions to get around the sun to the other side. First runner across to the other side gets to be the next "sun" and calls "Run around the Sun!"

After a while, I let those who have already won come and help me judge new winners from the side lines. Gradually, fewer and fewer kids race against each other. In this way, slower kids race only against each other, and the faster kids feel important to be helping me judge.

Sara, a nine year-old Down Syndrome child in my class, has difficulty running fast, so she was one of the last to run around the sun. She and her Educational Assistant ran against the second last child, who won that race. Not to let Sara feel badly about being last, I grabbed her hand and we ran against her E.A. To my delight, the whole class cheered her on. Of course, Sara won that race.

But the best part was the reaction of my young saints. Spontaneously, they ran up to her, formed a circle around her, slapped her on the back, shouted hoorah and congratulated her on winning. It looked like a scene from the Olympics! Sara beamed from ear to ear. Yes, she had been last, but in her mind, she was a gold medalist. And in the minds of her big-hearted classmates, she's a winner, too.

Truly this was evidence of the Spirit of God at work!

I thank God for showing me this impromptu outburst of love from my grade one class.

A Profound Thought

by Ann Prothero Dimmick

Ann Prothero Dimmick is adjunct professor at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan

The cecropia moth is a marvelous creation. Its wing spread can be as wide as six inches tip to tip. The coloring is a detailed woven tapestry of brown, black, cream, and rusty-orange. As is most often the case, the larva is distinctly different from the adult moth. The only common characteristic is that they are both very large in comparison to other species of moths. The larva of the cecropia is a brilliant green with tiny black specks intermittently spaced throughout the body. Four small antennae on the head are red-orange.

I learned all of this during the teaching of a unit entitled "Backyard Adventure," which I do each year with my fifth-grade students. One of these students found and brought in the larva of the cecropia. We placed the caterpillar in a plastic container with grass and poked holes in the lid of the container for ventilation. We checked the container a few days later and found to our surprise, a large cocoon, unlike any we had ever seen before. It was attached to the lid; a brown sack measuring three inches long. We researched the cecropia and found that the larva would remain in the cocoon state for the winter months.

Throughout the remainder of the fall, we often would carefully raise the lid and peek at our wondrous, large brown cocoon. As fall moved into winter, however, we forgot about the living creature that was completing its metamorphosis in the plastic container on the ledge.

One sunny late February day, I walked by the container, and remembered the "find" of fall. I carefully opened the lid, expecting to see the seemingly dormant cocoon, waiting for spring. To my surprise, the cecropia moth had hatched, and to my horror, a deformed cecropia moth lay struggling for breath, trying to make wings that were wrinkled and misshapen do what they were supposed to do — pump and fly! The children had noticed my surprise upon opening the lid and, of course, wanted to see this marvelous cecropia that we had waited the winter months to see. What a sad sight it was, and the question immediately arose from the students, "What can we do?"

I was at a loss. We discussed all the possibilities. We could allow the moth to struggle with hopes of improvement. We could try to intervene with sugar water feedings. We could put the moth to sleep quickly, with help from the science lab. We prayed and dismissed for recess with the understanding we would continue the discussion when we returned.

Following recess, I asked for comments and considerations. A student named Timothy raised his hand and provided the title of this article and I quote: "If the cecropia's life span had been uninterrupted and we had not brought it into captivity, then we would not be responsible; but because we upset the way that God plans for a cecropia to grow, we have a responsibility to not let it suffer anymore. I think we should put it to sleep."

We have learned to observe nature in nature. I have, once again, learned from the wisdom of children.

Thinking Thirteen

Nancy Knol
Column Editor
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Farewell

Nancy Knol teaches English and religion at Grand Rapids Christian High School. She has spent most of her teaching career in middle school and is co-author of the book Reaching and Teaching Young Adolescents.

The school year had ended. It had been a remarkable, wonderful year, in spite of the extremely difficult personal places along the way. My family had said goodbye to my father, and my son had nearly lost his eyesight due to a school injury. This day, as I looked about my classroom, I felt a bit sad.

Much as I love summer and the freedom of it, that year the end had felt a bit ... premature. I wanted one more Bible or English class with these eighth-graders — one more poem to pore over, one more final word. This made me smile, as I recalled how restless and weary we had all been the last few weeks. All the tables and chairs had been stacked uniformly against one wall, the posters and mobiles and projects had all been packed away — it was all so clean and ugly. As I wandered out into the hallway, I noticed that the custodian had opened each locker door for later inspection. Funny how it made me catch my breath momentarily, as each open door looked like an extended arm for just a moment, waving a farewell.

One locker remained conspicuously closed, and I wandered over to inspect it. The lock was still on, and I knew it must be Tim's locker. He had struggled with it all year, and this time he had just left it in one last moment of frustration and eagerness to escape. A thousand Tim memories made a quick fast-forward through my mind — his winning smile, his unlikely friendship with a girl named Cathy, who was more his best friend than any boy had been, unusual in middle school.

Two lockers down a navy hooded sweatshirt trailed out from an open locker. I knew it belonged to Eric. Eric, who was forever leaving pieces of himself behind — his notebook on the table where he had been sitting, his Bible placed secretly behind my stereo speakers, even his gym shorts in one of the crates in the back of the room. Lack of organization aside, it had also felt as if he was always trying to leave his mark in whatever way he could so that he would not be forgotten or overlooked. As if I could forget him ... child of golden lion eyes and bold spirit. One last glance into one more locker, David's locker. Sure enough, it appeared empty at first glance, but there remained a revealing little trace of him too. Along one side of the locker was taped a small piece of paper. Upon closer inspection I discovered that he had taped a piece of the chapel program there — it was the part that contained the class verse: "Who do you say that I am?" Jesus' all-important question was placed there in the recesses of the locker of David the skeptic, David the negative, David the questioning intellectual, for him to encounter and hopefully ask himself upon occasion. My fears for him subsided a bit at that moment.

Now that they had all departed, what would they remember about their journey through middle school? What seeds had we middle school teachers sown, consciously and unconsciously? Sometimes I think we would be shocked to discover what we have taught them — not Robert Frost or solving equations or World War II or rocks and minerals so much as relationship. That is where it all lands at the end. It is why I recognized who had inhabited each of those lockers. It is why it was so hard to leave that day. It is why that question David left behind is still so poignant, this year, and in years to come.

I turned and took one last look at all those open blue beautiful lockers, and, foolishly, but without hesitation, I waved back.

Readers' Response

A Definite 'Maybe' to Adam and the Dinosaurs

In their article "Adam and the Dinosaurs" (CEJ December 2000 issue), Stegink and Van Woerkom describe a science teacher's "pickle" over being asked by a student if Adam named the dinosaurs. After first answering that this "is a mystery ... we may never know," these authors have a change of heart and encourage Christian educators to say, "No." Why? Because dinosaurs became extinct 65 million years before humans ever appeared.

Having had years of experience in biological research and science education, I am greatly disturbed by the finality of this negative answer. I have found that such an emphatic answer can serve to stifle a Christian student's curiosity in science. This answer reduces the question's significance by labeling it as something we may never know and, hence, why investigate it. More alarming, however, is the likelihood that the negative answer perpetuates a common misconception of modern-day science — that an interpretation of scientific facts is a revealed truth which should not be questioned.

A questionable theory

It is commendable that the authors of this article have recognized both the theological and the scientific facets of this question, but, unfortunately, they have chosen as supporting evidence only those interpretations that would naturally lead to a negative answer. On the theological side, it is true that Genesis offers two accounts of the creation, but their belief that these accounts are not in harmony with each other is not necessarily the only conclusion that can arise from these accounts. And on the scientific side, they believe that the theory of evolution is useful in tying all of biology together. It "explains similarities in the visual anatomy of the wide variety of organisms ... it clarifies the distribution of organisms among the earth's continents ... it provides a mode for understanding how gene changes..." etc. Yet today, many non-Christian scientists admit that the theory of evolution cannot explain the origin of the world around us, and that the belief in evolution is not necessary for doing scientific research. Why should a Christian student be encouraged to change his interpretation of Scripture (i.e. that Adam did name the dinosaurs) based on a theory that even non-Christians question?

I am quite aware of the origin debate and that the distinction between a scientific "fact" and the "explanation for that fact" is misrepresented in many of today's university-level biology textbooks. As Christian educators we need to make students aware of the distinction between fact and explanation and not insist that they accept only one particular interpretation of Scripture or of the scientific evidence as being the absolute truth. By answering NO to the question of whether or not Adam named the dinosaurs, we would be endorsing only one of the many interpretations of Genesis and of the scientific facts. Although we should feel free to confess our own personal beliefs, we need to encourage our students to explore the fascinating questions of origin from many different perspectives.

Rather than stating an emphatic NO, I believe that the pedagogically sound answer to the question of whether or not Adam named the dinosaurs is a definite MAYBE, regardless of my own personal perspectives on creation and evolution. The teacher can then help the student to learn about the several different theories of origins and so recognize the prejudices associated with each, including the one the student believes in. Since the question of origins is an interdisciplinary question, the teacher can introduce the student to many different academic fields, including those areas of biology that provide the scientific evidence for (or against) the theory of evolution.

Dr. Gary Chiang
professor of biology at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ont.

No Need for Practice

Please accept my comments about "Adam and the Dinosaurs," which appeared in your December 2000 issue. I was surprised to see your bold acceptance of the theory of God-controlled "evolution" as expressed in this article. For me, it seems to limit God's ability to make man in his own image the first time and do it perfectly.

My God is one who does not need to practice and remake his creation. To delegate this role to him demotes him to human terms; He is sovereign and all powerful. I choose to believe that he can and did create us in his image the first time and without fault.

Interesting use of the potter passage in Jeremiah. I always took this as an illustration of how God works in redemption; the "recreating" of fallen man into a child of his; from sinner to saint. I am not sure Jeremiah was trying to explain the act of creation; instead he was merely illustrating how God takes broken and damaged lives and rebuilds them for his glory and use.

Donovan L. Kramer
Camdenton, Missouri

More Responses

Adam had a blast naming the dinosaurs

Some 30 years ago, I might also have questioned Greg's belief that Adam was around to name the dinosaurs (see Messrs. Stegink and Van Woerkom in the December 2000 issue of CEJ), but now I would congratulate him on his confidence in the Bible and his correct interpretation of current discoveries in science. There are other things that I would have said to Greg.

I would remind Greg that his worksheets on rocks and fossils, if based on traditional geology, would promote the idea that the ages of rocks are based on certain "index" fossils found in the rocks, while these same fossils are "dated" according to the type of rock in which they are entombed. He should also know that the famous radiometric dating system used to support this method has enough speculation in its calculations to be thrown out in a court of law, let alone a lab of science. Greg could have more confidence in asking a classmate for a date to the prom than in asking a geologist to provide a date for a chunk of granite.

Greg's teachers also said that they were in a "pickle" about how Adam could have named *all* the animals, including sea creatures and fish. Well, God said in Genesis 2:19-20 that "the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field." I would tell Greg that "all" to God should be "all" I really need to know. If I can't imagine exactly how this would include fish, etc., that's okay. It was certainly within God's ability to bring every creature to Adam.

The authors also wondered why Christians study biology, anatomy and physiology anyway. Yes, we do need competent doctors, environmentalists and geneticists, but I would warn Greg that whatever field he pursues, he should not look to Evolution for guidance or truth. The whole purpose of Evolution is to explain the natural world in the absence of a supernatural God. Even saying that God "created slowly" only adds doubt and confusion, because it contradicts observable evidence, and, what is more important, it undermines the value of Genesis as the foundation for the entire Bible.

I would tell Greg that there may be "evidence" that the earth is billions of years old, that dinosaurs disappeared before Adam (Then wouldn't death have to come *before* the Fall? Just a question), and that other "Adams" came before the one that Jesus and the apostles so often referred to (as in "one Adam"). However, he should also realize that an overwhelming body of evidence is growing that shows that these beliefs are unfounded and untrue. The reason that many are unaware of the scientific supports for a literal Creation is that they are regularly dismissed by mainstream science and the media. There are also many Christians who are not familiar with the work of the Institute for Creation Research, *Answers in Genesis* and *Creation* magazine, all of which report on the Lull spectrum of science within a biblical context

Greg has probably heard by now, and I would encourage him to continue his interest, that the words and work of these people is in great demand throughout the world because of their biblical consistency and their scientific credibility, and, most of all (I believe), because God has blessed their faithfulness. They have reached thousands through websites, debates, publications, and radio and television broadcasts; interest in their work is multiplying. Many of their publications have been translated into other languages because of the great demand.

As Christian educators, we have to be up on current science, so I would urge all of us to closely examine the organizations mentioned above. God is consistent with us. I believe that we have to be consistent with our instruction to his children when we teach about his Word and his world. And by the way, I believe that Adam did name the dinosaurs, and probably had a blast doing it.

Michael DuMez
Oostburg, Wisconsin

Insights on literature

Thanks for another great issue of CEJ! As a children's literature prof, I really appreciated and learned from the articles [in the October 2000 issue on Secular and Christian Literature]. We discuss Christian and non-Christian literature, and I've always been stuck for a definition. The articles really give me and my students some things to think about and some insights to get a handle on this issue. Keep up the good work! Godspeed!

Ed Starkenburg,
Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa

Government Embrace

Just a note of encouragement and thanks for an excellent [Dec. 2000] edition of the CEJ. The "Compromise in Governance?" discussion touched on issues that are of special interest to me. Hearing the opinions of others concerning issues of governance and funding was enlightening.

I am just in the process of reading *The Ambiguous Embrace: Government and Faith-Based Schools and Social Agencies* by Charles L. Glenn. What I've read so far has been excellent. This book was recommended to me by John Hiemstra of the Kings University College, who is also mentioned in the acknowledgements. You may find this a good read as well as a sound resource.

Jack Vanden Pol, principal
Central Alberta Christian High School, Lacombe, Alta.

Book Review

James Davison Hunter, *The Death of Character: Moral Education in an Age Without Good or Evil*. New York: Basic Books, 2000. 231 pages plus 87 pages of bibliography and index.
Reviewed by Steve J. Van Der Weele, Calvin College (Retired)

Steve J. Van Der Weele
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If character has expired, as Hunter's title suggests, it has not been for lack of heroic efforts to keep the patient alive. Moral education, a concern of every generation in American history, now tops the agenda of numerous agents concerned with the moral turpitude of our time. State legislatures, community task forces, educational committees and sub-committees, and civic organizations are becoming involved in identifying the core values we need to cultivate character and devising ways to inculcate these values in the young.

Surely, one would expect that with all these resources we would have attained by now a mature society of virtuous children and adults. Surely such work must yield positive results. "The stakes are immediate, tangible, and consequential." Surely only the cynics and the pessimists will view all this energy with skepticism.

But Hunter outlines with careful argument and extensive documentation that, as much as we wish to achieve the virtuous society, we will probably fail unless we reform our goals and our methods. Many of these conferences and task forces proceed by selecting, say, 12, or 24, or 8 virtues to be taught and defined in the classroom. But this is already an invitation to failure. What is lacking in this piece-meal approach is the realization that such virtues cannot finally survive without a normative cosmos, a universe which is perceived to exist apart from the individual and which has the authority to shape his mind and heart and soul and to obligate him to fulfill moral commitments congruent with his status as a human being.

Hunter carefully traces how ideas of human nature have changed over the centuries. The older world view, exhibited most fully in the Bible, accepted a transcendent God, concerned for righteousness and justice, and willing to intervene, with awesome contradictions to himself, to re-establish the human race and set it on a path of selfless service modeled by his sacrificial ministry. The ancient philosophers also defined virtue in terms of transcendent principles, acknowledging their dependence on a world apart from themselves and not of their making. These assumptions lasted for many centuries.

Then the changes began to appear. What changes? Psychology began to replace theology and metaphysics, character and moral maturity yielded to personality. Accomplishment, duty, loyalty, community and accountability gave way to a self-centeredness which emphasized development rather than rectitude, emancipation rather than discipline, permissiveness rather than restraint and self-denial. The whole movement had a therapeutic force — its chief concern being the enhancement of one's self image. Low self-esteem is now regarded as the deadliest of the sins. Most dramatically, whereas the older cultures called for renunciation of the self, for self-denial and sacrificial living, for making ethical decisions which may even be to the disadvantage of the individual, the new environment calls for self-gratification and self-enhancement. The individual becomes his own authority for his decisions. Unless these assumptions are challenged, Hunter contends, all the legislatures and task forces will not get beyond refinements of "values clarification," self-esteem techniques and ethical fitness seminars. We want virtue on the cheap,and we are unwilling to pay the price.

Several additional topics occupy the pages of Hunter's work. The first is the unsettling demonstration that the Protestant evangelical churches have bought into the reigning psychological paradigm in their instructional materials. Even James Dobson resorts to psychological categories to promote his programs — frequently subordinating religious considerations to psychological ones (Jews and Catholics do better here). What the students learn, then, is a calculated utilitarianism which contends that virtue is more expedient than vice. Stealing and cheating and using drugs are not defined as disobedience but as ultimately likely to endanger one's self-esteem.

A second topic — a subtext, as he calls it — concerns the complexities of teaching morality in a pluralistic society. Law has been deprived of religious content, made neutral over time through the litigation by minorities who resisted the religious ethos which gave structure to moral pedagogy. Thus, a process of cultural homogenization has occurred, a flattening of values to the level of the lowest common denominator. Paradoxically, it is the particular communities, the enclaves of institutions which have retained some sense of the sacred and claim authority for the ethical life, that will hold at bay the nihilism which will ensue as a consequence of current patterns of thought. And, as a third topic, Hunter writes extensively about the banality, superficiality, and inversion of values which come to us through the industry of popular entertainment.

Hunter is a bit shy when he uses the terms sacred and god talk in his conversation about character. But readers of this journal know what those enclaves look like. They are institutions which protest against those regimes which exert their cultural imperialism over the length and breadth of the land. Like our churches, faithful to their calling. Our Christian colleges. Our Christian schools. Our Christian journals. And the vision of the Kingdom which motivates us in our response to our Lord's gracious summons to Christian discipleship.

John Van Dyk, *The Craft of Christian Teaching: A Classroom Journey*. 2000. Sioux Center, Iowa: Dordt Press. 288 pages, with illustrations.
Reviewed by Donald Oppewal, Professor of Education (Emeritus), Calvin College.

Philosopher of Education Van Dyk has done in this book what only a few philosophers have dared to do; he has fused three discrete areas of educational discourse into a unified body of educational wisdom. He stands firmly in the arena of the classroom. He describes controversies and differing views in the idiom of the teacher. And he discusses talk of "isms" not in the technical language of the schools of philosophy (like realism and pragmatism) but in the language of classroom alternatives (like individualism and behaviorism).

Overall strategy

In his book, Van Dyk responds to a plea from teachers to whom he lectured at conventions — teachers who appreciated his "flowery speeches about education" but challenged him with "Why don't you tell us how to translate all this charming talk into practical classroom walk?" (p.7)

The interplay of categories characterizes the entire book; indeed, it is one of its strengths. While some theoreticians might see it as more inspirational than analytical, and more homiletic than profound, it does effectively identify the prevailing controversies about pedagogy, or teaching strategies. These issues go deeper than classroom techniques and call for an overriding strategy that keeps the methods internally consistent with each other, but all the while rooted as well in pervasive principles. Van Dyk has indeed made a strenuous effort to ground these principles with underpinnings of the Christian faith.

Avoiding the proof text approach of so many other books on methodology, many of which support some practice with a single Bible text, Van Dyk finds certain biblical themes that resonate — for him, at least — with given pedagogical practices.

One example of such a pervasive pedagogy is that of cooperative learning, or his preferred term, "the collaborative classroom." He contrasts this teaching style with the individualistic, or the competitive classroom. In the former, each student does his or her own work, and in competition with classmates to achieve recognition. Helping a classmate to find the right answer is not only counter-productive, but is defined as cheating — producing work not exclusively one's own. The collaborative classroom, by contrast (see pp. 120-125 for a helpful summary), comes close to the heart of many of Van Dyk's exhortations to teach Christianly.

Communal task

What Scriptural themes underlie this approach to education? He finds these themes discernible in both the Old and the New Testament, notably in the biblical vision calling for community. He writes, "One of the unmistakable biblical givens is the calling to be one body, to be a community, to be members of one another, and to be co-laborers with Christ" (p. 120). He links this principle with such practices as teacher-student joint planning, students' responsibility for each other's learning, and the submitting of joint assignments and reports. He also summons the biblical mandate for encouraging servanthood as a life style, both as support for the collaborative classroom and an educational outcome of it.

Van Dyk is fully aware that pursuing all the permutations of the collaborative classroom is "a daunting task." He devotes much of the book to an elaboration and description of these variations, including classroom management and discipline. Throughout, the author encourages teachers to pursue the ideal even in the face of initial failures. As the subtitle suggests, he is describing a journey, not a destination. Van Dyk strongly implies the truth that professional development is a life-long journey, one that any professional teacher professing faithfulness to Christ needs to take in their professional life as well as in their personal life.

I can imagine fellow teachers gathering around this book for refreshment and assurance that teaching Christianly consistently may be difficult but not impossible. I can also imagine an instructor in teacher education using this text as an example of a serious attempt to link teaching practices to Christian beliefs and, thus, progressing toward authentic integration of faith and learning, a much-used and sometimes abused phrase in academic circles.

For those teachers, whether beginning or experienced, who need both direction and reassurance that they are on the right track of teaching Christianly, this is a must read. But for the skeptics and the nay-sayers of collaborative learning, this is also a must read. For it is the latter who need to be challenged by this book to arrive at and develop a teaching style compatible with their professed Christian theology.

A minor cavil of some readers might be that the quirky and queer drawings sprinkled throughout the text have as much likelihood of distracting the reader from the text as directing him to it.