

A forum for Christian school educators

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Scales of Injustice

To seek funding or not to seek funding



Bert Witvoet

Within me, I find two approaches to the question of government funding of Christian schools, and they are somewhat in conflict. That is because the one approach comes from my view of Creation and Redemption, and the other comes from my view of the Fall.

My view of Creation and Redemption pleads for full funding of all schools, regardless of educational philosophy. Government funding for all schools is a justice issue. Because all citizens of a country are created in the image of God, they ought to be treated with equity. The coming of Christ's Kingdom reiterates that sense of equal worth. As emissaries of Christ, we should bring people back to the wonderful freedom of living according to the will of God for his creation. This justice is not a matter of "just us." We have an obligation to demand educational and cultural justice for all groups — Muslims, Jews, Hindus and Natives. The idea that all of us should be blended into a national or societal melting pot is an idolatrous belief. National unity must be built on respect for differences.

We may well want to argue that the money doled out by the state is taxpayers' money. And since parents who send their children to a Christian school are taxpayers, it is really their money that we want back for our schools. But that is not how it works in a society that entrusts certain tasks to the state. We should not consider tax money our money. Critics of independent school funding argue rightly that grandparents or singles also pay school taxes, an outlay for which they receive no benefit.

Misleading slogans

The problem lies not in the fact that the state is a trustee of the money. It lies in the unwillingness of a pluralist society to recognize the validity of different world views and different approaches

to education. To disguise their blatant intolerance, opponents play with clever slogans and sound bites. A few months ago, I was at a hearing on the granting of tax credits to parents who send their children to independent schools in Ontario (the bill that proposed such tax credits has since passed). In the back of the room

was a handful of protesters who held up identical signs that read: "No public money for private schools." It all looks so logical. How can you question that slogan?

You can, but then you have to challenge the terminology. First of all, if secular schools are to be called "public schools" then so should Christian schools. We, too, are part of the public. We should resist the terminology of "private schools." Christianity is not a private matter. Why does a pluralist society not allow a plurality of systems of education? Who says that public education has to be one-size-fits-all? A pluralist society that funds only a monolithic system pays lip service to pluralism and is basically intolerant.

I could go on and on. You, educators in Christian schools, know all the angles of educational justice.



Calvin Memorial Christian School in St. Catharines, Ont., responded to the provincial government's announcement that parents who send their children to independent schools will receive a refundable tax credit with the above statement.

Benevolent tyranny

But, now, suppose our society caught on to the unfairness of it all. Suppose they had a change of heart and could see our reasoning. Would you want your school to be fully funded? My view of the Fall of humankind says, "No. Be careful. Watch out. He who pays the piper calls the tune."

Throughout the centuries since Christ, Christians have stood over against one or another empire. Each empire had a tendency to want to usurp more power than God wants it to have. In the early days, it was the Roman empire that required the worship of the emperor and the support of a mentality of conquest. Today it is the democratic state which wants us to bow at the altar of

human rights, the autonomy of the individual and political correctness, to mention only a few of the lesser deities. It is often the “benevolence” of the collective that gets us into trouble. To make the public school a place of “unity and non-discrimination,” teachers may appeal only to the lowest common denominator. As a result, the forces of agnosticism, immorality and materialism run rampant in the public school. There is very little that allows for condemnation.

Living in a democracy may make us think that we are free to do what we want to do in education. But that is an illusion. Both the United States and Canada know something about the tyranny of the majority. The majority never has been and never will be comfortable with dissidents. Once people start thinking within the box of the dominant ideology, they evaluate everything from the point of view of that box. The integrity of Christian schools is constantly threatened by demands to comply or conform. These demands increase as the schools become dependent on government funding. Add to that the fact that Christians themselves are infected with the dominant ideology and easily import “foreign” ideas and practices into their schools.

All of this should be enough to make us wary of full funding.

Need for commitment

But then there is an added danger. With full funding we face the potential loss of commitment. Full-hearted support and commitment is strongly connected to the fact that we have to sacrifice for Christian education. Once Christian education no longer costs us any money, we may well take it for granted. My view of the sinfulness of our human condition tells me that.

I just have to look at the ease with which many of us go through life. We live in prosperous countries in prosperous times. Our greatest enemy is hedonism. Our youth is falling prey to the pleasure principle. St. Paul predicted this cozy relationship to

hedonism when he wrote that in the last days there will be godlessness, people will be “lovers of themselves, lovers of money, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.” Hedonism is the relentless pursuit of happiness. Serving this idol can be done through focusing on possessions and power, as my generation has done; but it can also be done through endlessly chasing after entertainment, travel, soft drugs, sex and other TGIF activities which keep our young people from focusing on the deeper things of life.

So, aren’t we blessed to have something left in our community for which we must sacrifice a lot — Christian education?

Tension packed

If you think my approach is dualistic, you’re right. It’s part of my awareness that the Kingdom is here and is coming; that we’re in the world but not of it. It’s the idea of working out our salvation in fear and trembling as God works in us through our will and actions. Scripture is full of dualities. One more doesn’t hurt. As long we don’t speak out of two sides of our mouth or serve both God and Mammon.

Actually, I would like it if all schools would receive partial funding or if all parents received vouchers that do not quite pay for the cost of education (unless they are too poor to pay even a little), provided the government would not determine the content of the curriculum other than to see to it that certain standards are maintained. That would both satisfy the Creation-Redemption issue of justice and take into account the sinful nature of governments and human beings living in prosperity.

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School Vouchers:

The Dream That Will Not Die

by Don Oppewal

Donald Oppewal is Professor of Education, Emeritus, at Calvin College and a long-time defender of parental rights in education.

The term “voucher” when applied to school funding has brought out the best and the worst in the American voter, legislator and judge. In its narrowest meaning, a voucher is a piece of paper which entitles the bearer to admission to a school of the holder’s choice, irrespective of whether it is a public school, a charter school, a parochial school, a private (for profit) school or a home school. All of these forms of schooling have existed for some time now: some, like charter schools, for only a decade, but others, like parochial schools, for centuries. In its broadest meaning, the term voucher has come to stand for any kind of public money to be used for anything but public education.

Stubborn resistance

With all the existing varieties of schools, both as to their ownership and as to their goals and practices, one would think that by now the public would recognize the right of parents to enroll their offspring in a school that fits their perception of a good school. One would also think that, with a strong constitutionally guaranteed tradition of religious freedom, the educational establishment would be prepared to accept the non-public, and religiously grounded school, as entitled to a share of the educational tax dollar.

Even the UN Declaration of Human Rights, which assigns to parents the right to select schools, has not moved the majority to assign school money to any school system other than the government-sponsored public school. Many other forms of schooling preceded the government school,

which was instituted to guarantee a free education to every child ; however, the promise of such free education to all has not been realized.

For those committed to a point of view not possible of fulfillment in a public school, the penalty for exercising choice has been substantial in terms of both money and the public’s acceptance of the role that multiple school systems have always played

It is time for the best legal minds and the best political minds, assisted by educational historians, to seize the opportunity

in producing citizens that contribute to the building of a stable society.

It is not for lack of trying that almost all forms of financial aid have failed to be built into public policy. For half a century those who seek justice in the form of recognition through tax support have utilized all the major channels for instituting change. They have tried state legislation, they have tried public referenda, they have tried the courts. All have produced either minuscule support, like bus rides, or outright rejection.

One would have thought that each of the attempts to find some acceptable way for parents to exercise freedom of choice would have resulted in finding the formula that would pass constitutional muster and be politically satisfactory to all. Such has not been the case.

While this is not the place to document each and every instance of the attempt, the outcome has been that when a given state legislature proposed, the courts disposed, and that when proponents succeeded in getting it on a referendum ballot, the people disposed. The reasoning that was used in

each case, both by proposers and disposers, is varied, and only the courts have left a trail to follow.

Failure in Michigan

Recently, in the State of Michigan, a public referendum included the provision that the State constitution would be altered from its present prohibition of any aid to any faith-based school in any form whatsoever, to one permitting such aid. It was soundly defeated and those with political acumen will speculate for years why this failed.

Some will say it was a flawed proposal incorporating as it did various elements such as teacher testing. That surely called out furious efforts by the teachers union leadership to defeat it, often by using public money to do so. Some invoked the mantra of preservation of separation of church and state, while others successfully used the argument that public schools would be impoverished by the sharing of the tax dollar.

The voucher concept is a dream that will not die, even though some of its expression has been more like a nightmare to those who believe in it. It will not die, because it expresses a just cause to those who back it. The gaining of civil rights took decades; the securing of religious rights may take even longer.

Some legislators, and occasionally courts, have acknowledged that parents have some rights that are at stake. Both of these avenues for change, the legislature and the courts, are still open to hearing the cause expressed, although with each defeat of some form of aid, it becomes more difficult to imagine what permutation of policy proposal will make the breakthrough.

Movement for change

The time has come for constitutional

experts to join with political theorists and educational historians to constitute themselves a blue ribbon panel to assess the future and its possibilities. The alternative, which is to do nothing, will surely cause the dream to die, and to doom forever the non-public forms of education to second-class status and open only to the wealthy. Who would institute such a movement, one that would learn from the past and forge into the future?

One of the decisions to be made is the selection of the form and arena in which change would be initiated. Of the three forms—referendum initiative, legislative action or judicial disposition—past action would suggest that both the public referendum and legislative action are least likely to produce movement. The public initiative approach presupposes that the general public is both knowledgeable enough to understand what is at stake and altruistic enough to vote on principle rather than self-interest. Legislative action is another means, one that has succeeded in small ways, like bus rides and loan of educational materials, but failed to achieve any sweeping change.

Pro-active efforts

That leaves the courts, the judicial system, as an arena where deep social issues are confronted and future policy is ham-

pered out. While the courts have as often as not ruled against attempts to secure justice in the form of a share of the educational dollar for non-public schools, this is largely due to the fact that they can deal only with that which has been brought before them. They do not initiate; they rule

cases were pursued by opponents of non-public education, they effectively used the doctrine of separation of church and state, based on the Establishment clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, to frustrate most efforts to secure justice for schools that are faith-based.

What would seem to be needed, then, is a court case initiated by believers in the cause, by citizens who base their case on the Free Exercise clause of the same Amendment. While court cases are notoriously slow in execution and tremendously expensive to pursue, much is at stake in this issue. Large amounts of money from both private benefactors and ecclesiastical organizations have been expended in previous efforts at change. Now these same sources of support could be sought for this new and different approach to securing justice.

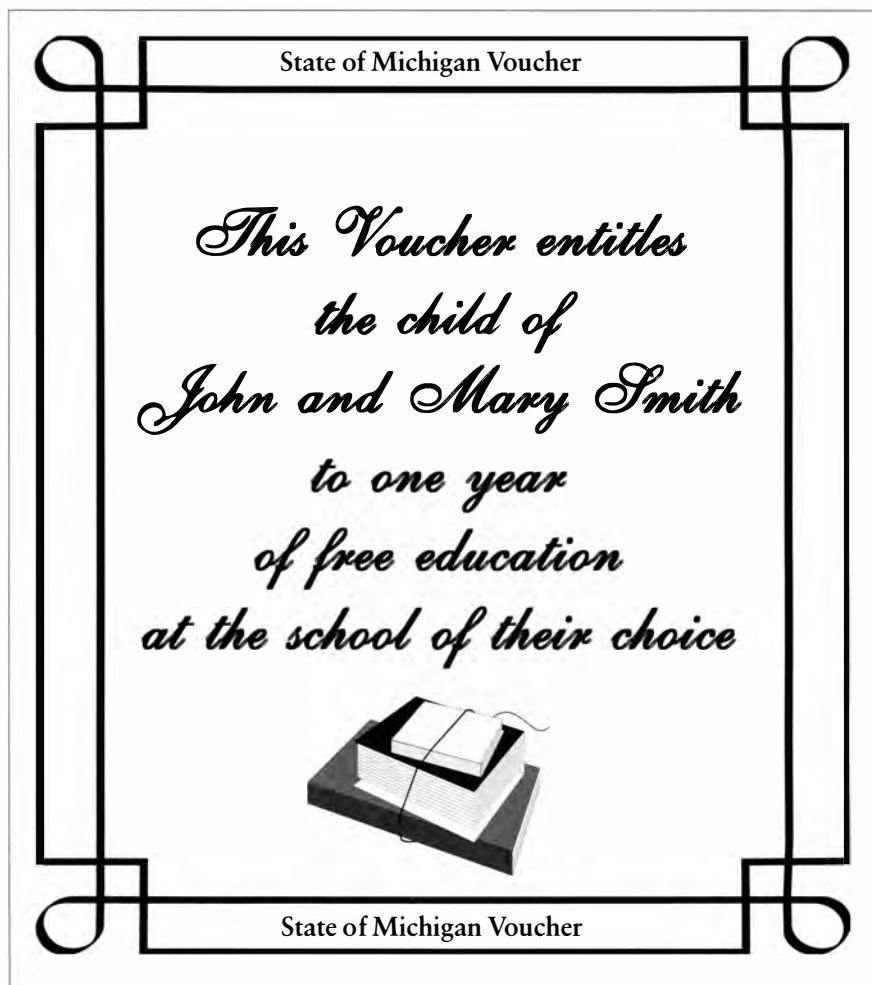
It is time for the best legal minds and the best political minds, assisted by educational historians, to seize the opportunity to initiate cases, rather than wait for the

when the litigants present something to them for adjudication.

It would seem that the dismal record of the courts, which again have recently ruled against legislative action in both California and Ohio, is not a result of court bias or prejudice against religion. But when

opposition to move even more aggressively against the 10 percent of parents who all these years have been denied justice.

Why stand we idle? Or do we?



A Plea for *Justice* and *Freedom* in Education

by John Vanden Berg

In 1975, John Vanden Berg was chairman of the Taxation and Christian Education Committee reporting to that year's synod of the Christian Reformed Church. We reprint part of the committee's report below, which is mostly the work of Dr. Vanden Berg, vice president at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Calvinists have consistently held that government is an agency of God's grace and that its primary duty is to promote justice. (See Romans 13:1-6; Calvin's *Institutes*, Book IV, Chapter 20, "On Civil Government"; and the Belgic Confession, Article XXXVI, The Magistracy.) Given the fact that society has made education compulsory, the government has become the agency through which the funds that are needed to support the educational enterprise are collected. Such funds are collected from all citizens, regardless of their religious convictions or lack of them. It would seem that justice would demand that they also be distributed without regard to one's religious convictions or lack of them.

Given the further fact that education is always religiously or philosophically oriented, it seems reasonable to conclude that the government is not fulfilling its obligation to promote justice when it supports only one approach to education over all others. Supporting one philosophy of education in preference over all others can hardly meet the demands of justice. And in the process of denying justice, the state also obstructs the freedom to choose the kind of education one wishes to support and have for his children.

In the field of education, freedom is the opportunity to teach our children in a way consistent with our ideals and values. In the American society, a pluralistic society of some two hundred million people, citizens have different ideals or values to which

they are committed. It is inconceivable that these two hundred million people will all have the same views on education. Because of this, it is essential that the independent or non-state school exist; for freedom requires alternatives from which to choose, including the alternative which is consistent with one's own commitment.



Former President Gerald Ford to whom Synod's statement was to be addressed

A person who has no choice is not free. Public education is a free choice only if alternative choices are available, and only if these choices are available without economic penalty. Such freedom does not exist in the United States and Canada today.

An urgent request

The following statement was addressed to the President of the United States by the Christian Reformed Synod of 1975 on be-

half of the Christian Reformed churches in the USA. (Synod requested the Council of Christian Reformed Churches in Canada to consider addressing itself to Canadian governmental bodies in regard to the matters contained in Synod's report. It believed that the Council of Christian Reformed Churches in Canada was a more appropriate body to speak for the Canadian segment of the denomination.):

We, the members of the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church, respectfully call to your attention the injustice which now prevails in the financing of education in the United States and earnestly urge you to do all within your power as President of the United States to remedy this situation so that justice may prevail in this country and a free, pluralistic society be promoted.

Education is compulsory in the United States at the elementary and secondary levels. We do not debate this position but do note that it is based on the premise that an educated citizenry is vital to the welfare of society and that, consequently, citizens must be compelled to go to school for a stipulated period of their lives. Education is compulsory, in other words, because it promotes the general welfare of society. We believe it is an unassailable position that children attending non-state schools meet the compulsory education requirements of the state, and that by attending school they are serving the public purpose of providing an educated citizenry.

Not only is education compulsory; it is also always religiously or philosophically oriented, regardless of the school one might attend. One might appeal to philosophers and theologians to support this position but he need not, for he can go to public school educators to support it.

Thus, the National Education Association has said:

"The development, of moral and spiritual values is basic to all other educational

objectives. Education uninspired by moral and spiritual values is directionless.... That educational purposes rest on moral and spiritual values has been generally recognized in the public school system. The Educational Policies Commission has previously declared: 'Every statement of educational purposes, including this one, depends upon the judgment of some person or group as to what is good and what is bad, what is true and what is false, what is ugly and what is beautiful, what is valuable and what is worthless in the conduct of human affairs'" (National Education Association, *Moral and Spiritual Values in the Public Schools*, 1951, p.7).

Whether or not one is persuaded that all education is philosophically or religiously oriented in a formal sense is not crucial, however, for the very concept of a pluralistic society implies the existence of different ideals and values to which the citizens are committed. Surely, it is inconceivable that the American society of close to

two hundred and twenty million people will all have the same views on education.

So now we find this situation: society compels her youthful citizens to attend school, but it will provide financial support only if they attend state owned, operated, and controlled schools. Parents have the right, protected by the Supreme Court of the United States in the 1925 Pierce case (*Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 268 U.S. 510, 1925) to send their children to non-state schools, yet when they exercise this right they are deprived of all public educational benefits. In other words, we exact a price for the exercise of freedom.

Liberty at a price — this is not liberty. This is the suppression of liberty. A genuinely free society cannot impose on its citizens any philosophic or religious creed as a condition for receiving the benefits of public education. To do so would be to ask one to violate his conscience and religious convictions. It also places the government in a position to control the

thought and belief of the people. In the field of education the government, in effect, says, "Accept the state view of education or give up your rights to the educational tax dollar." This is unjust and can only result in a diminution of freedom and the destruction of a genuinely pluralistic society.

In taking this position, we are not unmindful of the principle of the separation of church and state; rightly interpreted, we are ardent supporters of the principle. Indeed, we respectfully note that the Christian Reformed Church was founded more than a hundred years ago by immigrants from the Netherlands who left their homeland because they were deeply disturbed by the existence of a state-established church. We, the children of these immigrants, are equally disturbed by the existence of a state-established philosophy of education in the United States. It is because we are disturbed that we feel compelled to address you with this petition.

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ENCOURAGEMENT ON THE BENCH

The Pursuit of Educational Justice in Ontario

by Adrian Guldemond

Adrian Guldemond is the executive director of the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools (www.oacs.org). He lives in Ancaster, Ont.

The tough question I often face from community members is: "Don't you get tired of this endless struggle for fair funding for our Christian schools?" My answer is usually: "No, the injustice is a mild burden compared to what Christians in the third world have to put up with."

Truthfully, I do not always feel positive, and I may even say something flippant like: "Yes, and perhaps the Lord is punishing us for not living in Alberta." But that is usually a momentary lapse. Although we take comfort from Christ's parable of the persistent widow, we are thankful for the prosperity we do enjoy. We bloom where we are planted. The Psalmist puts it in perspective much better: "Praise the Lord. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. Who can proclaim the mighty acts of the Lord or fully declare his praise? Blessed are they who maintain justice, who constantly do what is right."

Yes, paying between \$6,000 and \$15,000 for tuition, when others get it free, is tough! We remind ourselves that we have made many small gains over the last 30 years. We have gained the first big step — funding for healthcare. All the constitutional obstacles are out of the way. Now we just have to deal with prejudice and poor information in the press.

A setback

Last fall the board of the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools (OACS) had just approved the plan for a major political campaign to take place in the spring of 2001. We were in a positive mood, in view of the successful conclusion to our health funding lobbying in 1999. All independent

schools are finally able to access healthcare support for special needs students.

Indicators from inside the government were positive, so we thought that we could responsibly ask the community for \$300,000 to start phase II, with the goal of achieving special education grants for special needs students. However, right after we made this decision, the Minister of Education, Janet Ecker, came out with a blunt "No funding. We are saving the public school" statement. In it she rejected full funding for independent schools and rejected the recent United Nations ruling which had been in our favor as well.

Seeing one of these statements in the national papers, along with the *Toronto Star* editorial denouncing vouchers, got me up-

a Second Cup and a Tim Horton's outlet, a little voice told me to sit down on a bench away from the food traffic. There was someone sitting on it. I decided to sit down anyway.

To my surprise, my bench mate was a very old acquaintance — now well retired — from my Toronto school board days. We had a little chat about shopping (his wife was out there somewhere, too) and we soon got to our favorite topic: politics. He listened to my dilemmas. Back in the old days, when I taught his children, I listened to him, too. And now he said something very encouraging — even though he did not know it.

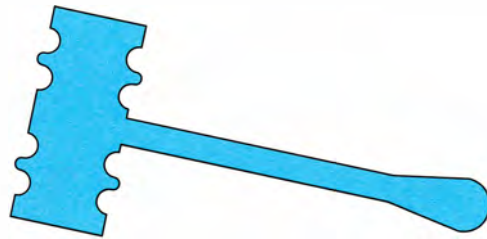
He said, "You remember all that trouble we had in Toronto back in the sixties? Well,



Students of Calvin Memorial Christian School in St. Catharines gathered on the front lawn of their school on June 8 of this year with Ontario government members of parliament to show support for government funding. Principal Karen Gerritsma is addressing the media and crowd facing the group.

set and indignant. The next Saturday I went shopping in nearby Mapleview Mall in Burlington. Sometimes it's good to distract yourself with temporal trivialities. As I was wandering around trying to decide between

look how well everything turned out after all. So don't you give up now. It wasn't easy in Holland either. God's kingdom is worth it. You need to lead and obey. It will come!"



Well, that made my day. I took this chance encounter as a sign that we should keep the course set by the pioneering founders of the Ontario schools.

View from my bench

I have over the years formed some firm convictions regarding the matter of public funding. I strongly believe that we will not be seduced by easy accommodations within public school boards — just for the money. On the other hand, we will not isolate ourselves into irrelevance either — just for our pride. The Reformed vision of justice — structural pluralism — means that we will remain engaged both constructively and subversively as we work to build credible institutions with multiple community support.

We may not be putting a fleece out on the lawn, as Gideon did, but a small sign now and then sure helps keep us on track and hopeful. As we were driving home, the text that came to mind was from Isaiah 42:1-4: “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope.”

I am grateful for many dedicated and talented volunteers, our colleagues and the many who continue to pray for justice so that many more families may enjoy the blessings of a Christian School education; God is faithful, can we be any less?

There are still opponents of funding among the Christian denominations, just as there are supporters for joining public school boards. I continue to believe that the best goal is a combination of legal re-

cognition and judicious semi-autonomy based on significant but partial funding. You read that correctly: “partial funding.” I do not support the attempt to gain full funding for Christian education. So far the evidence points to the fact that partial funding is the way to safeguard the vision and improve Christian education with more resources.

Faithful to the story

That vision is the motivator and the beacon. It is often good to remind ourselves of it. Let me put it in the words of Dr. John Bolt, now at Calvin Seminary:

“Here, then, is my vision for Christian

“So don’t you give up now. You need to lead and obey. It will come!”

education as we face the third millennium Anno Domini. The Christian school, like any school, is essentially a community of memory, remembering the story of what the triune God has done, is doing, and will do for and with his people. Its memory also gives it a vision, a vision of the kingdom of God and above all impels it into mission, a subversive mission. What the Christian story subverts is the reign of darkness; its subversion is thus constructive. If the Christian school is true to the Christian story, it will invite students, and through them others, to join the saving, liberating mission of God and his people to the world.

“Imagine with me a revolutionary and truly counter-cultural subversion situation.

Our Christian education graduates having been told the Christian story, having been exposed to that story lived out by actual people in the history of the church, people such as Augustine, St. Francis, Martin Luther and John Calvin, John Wesley, Abraham Kuyper, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Theresa, Laszlo Tokes, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and John Paul II, and having the life of Christian discipleship modeled before them by committed and loving teachers, actually take the story as their own and live it in their own lives. Their practice of sexuality, marriage, and family life is in sharp contrast to the interpersonal wasteland of contemporary North American society. Their attitude to creation, to other races and cultures, to the unborn, to the elderly and infirm, dramatically differs from that of a selfish consumerist society. Illumined by the Word, they see the world through different eyes. Fuelled by centuries of wonderful Christian reflection on life in the world, they think differently from the world. In fact, miracle of miracles in our post-modern world, they THINK! What a witness that would be! What a public good! The Christian school as a training ground for revolutionaries, for constructive subversives!”

Propelled forward by such a vision, we continue with the good fight of faith. Yes, the fair funding campaign is now in full swing. See for yourself on our website: www.fairfunding.ca. Join the pursuit of justice!

Editor’s note: At the time of this writing, Adrian Guldmond had no inkling that a tax credit refund would be introduced in the Ontario government’s budget this summer. But it is generally recognized that it was the Ontario Alliance which put this idea before the government.

A slice of justice for independent schools in Ontario

by Bert Witvoet

If in April of this year you would have said to anyone living in the province of Ontario that the provincial government would introduce a budget in early May which would give parents who send their children to an independent school a refundable tax credit, you could have expected something like the following: "Yes, and the Pope is going to convert to Protestantism."

For over 40 years, the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools has banged its collective head against the walls of bureaucracy and political expediency. Even though, through a historical precedent, Roman Catholic Schools are fully funded in Ontario, along with the formerly Protestant schools, now known as secular public schools, the standard reply to the Christian school supporters has been: "No public money for private schools."

Yes, the Supreme Court of Canada had declared in 1996 that the province was discriminating against parents who prefer private education over public education, but it added that this form of discrimination was permissible. And, yes, a United Nations panel had ruled in January 2000 that Ontario was treating private school parents unfairly, but that ruling carried no political clout.

Without warning

Little wonder that almost every Ontario citizen was taken by surprise when, on May 9, the Minister of Finance announced a tax credit for parents who send their child to an independent school. Even the Minister of Education was reportedly caught off guard a few days before the announcement. Both she and the premier had earlier said with great determination that vouchers for parents or funding for private schools was out of the question and that the government would focus on fixing the public system. Technically speaking, giving a tax

credit to parents is not the same as providing funding to independent schools, but the impact would almost be the same — the schools would benefit as parents would find it easier to come up with the cost of tuition.

When the news broke, some public school supporters exploded in outrage at the very idea of "public money going to private schools." Public teachers unions denounced the decision as a further attack on the public system. Opposition parties called it a voucher system in disguise and they capitalized on a strongly adverse reaction by forcing the government to, at least, hold hearings on the matter. These hearings took place during two weeks in June, and, on June 28, the government passed the budget into law with the tax credit intact.

What exactly does the tax credit look like? Not all the details have been worked out, but, starting in January of 2003, parents of children attending an independent school can claim on their 2002 income tax form a credit that will not be connected to tax paid or tax owing. The amount is not yet known, but in the next three years it is expected to rise to 50 per cent of tuition paid, with a cap placed at \$3,500.

Excellence through competition

What motivated the Conservative government of Ontario to take what many observers consider a political risk? The main objective of this government seems to be to introduce the competitive dimension of market ideology into the field of education. According to the Minister of Finance, "all boats rise with the tide." Parental choice, the government believes, will make public schools more accountable and more alert.

It is no secret that this government has been seeking greater efficiency in public education over the years, believing that there is too much waste in the system. And it has infuriated public school teachers unions ever

since it began to demand compulsory upgrading and testing of teachers as well as more classroom time. Mention the name of Mike Harris, the premier of Ontario, to a public school teacher, and chances are he or she will let go of a few choice invectives. Relations between public service unions and this government have been strained by the latter's insistence that the bottom line should dictate the expanse of social and cultural programs.

Among independent school supporters, reaction to the tax credit has been mostly positive. They may not have liked the haste in which the government proceeded (the hearings were designed more to quiet the voice of opposition than to change anyone's mind), and they may not agree with the government's promotion of corporate materialism, but they realize that there is little fairness in this game of political upmanship anyway. Opposition parties thoroughly misrepresented the independent schools as they painted them as elite schools for the rich. And although they realize that a tax credit does not represent full educational justice, supporters thanked God for providing a way to make the financial burden lighter for many parents. Parents would resist calling themselves beggars, but they realize they can't always be choosers.

When it comes to educational justice, other provinces like British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba have done much better. There, schools get funded up to 50 per cent, and, there, within the public school system (at least in Alberta), there is more room for alternative schooling than in most other provinces.

But who would have thought that Ontario, of all places, would break with centuries of educational hegemony and do some justice to its slogan "Ontario — a place to stand"?

A Real-life Lesson in Politics

by Alan Doerksen



TORONTO, Ont. (With files and photo from the *Christian Courier*) — Students from the Hamilton District Christian High School in Ancaster, Ontario, appeared before a provincial government committee at the Ontario Legislature to speak out in support of the government's proposed tax credit to parents who send their children to the province's independent schools.

Under the leadership of their teacher Harry Meester, the students brainstormed and researched the key issues involved in fair funding. Four focus groups debated, team-wrote and edited speeches to be given at the Toronto hearing on June 11. The students drew news coverage and their speeches were published in the *Hamilton Spectator*. On June 21, two of the students took part in a CBC- Radio open forum discussion.

Twelfth-grade student Sarah Postuma explained some of the core values of her school in the following presentation to the committee: "Our parents believe that school is an extension of the home, and have exercised that belief through their choice of schools. For 20 years, my parents have been involved in Christian education by sending five children through elementary and

secondary schools.... As a family, we have had to make sacrifices, largely due to tuition costs. However, my parents were willing to make these sacrifices because they wanted the teachers and curriculum to be consistent with their values.

Student Josh VanKampen spoke about equal rights and made reference to a 1999 ruling of a United Nations panel that Ontario's policy of funding Catholic but not other religious schools is unfair. Corrie Kessler explained to the committee how independent schools use money very efficiently. Nate DeJonge sketched out some of the economic hardships faced by families which send children to Christian schools, thereby attacking the idea that "private schools consist of mostly upper-class families."

Jake Belder concluded the student presentation by saying: "The proposed tax credit for parents of children who attend independent schools is something we are very appreciative of and thankful for.... We hope that this bill will be passed and that equity will be achieved in Ontario."

The bill did pass two weeks after the students' presentation, on June 28.

Keys to the Treasure Chest of Reading

by Karen Milligan

Karen Milligan has taught pre-school through college level for the past 28 years. She has written several books and articles and lives in Arlington Heights, Illinois.

Josh dropped his wet baseball mitt on the kitchen floor and pried off his muddy tennis shoes. He knew Grandma must be in the attic. Climbing the retractable ladder, he spied Grandma sitting on a battered footstool holding a dull gold key in her right hand, just staring at it.

Josh pulled himself up and asked, "What is that for?"

Grandma smiled and stuck the key into the lock of the enormous leather trunk. Click. The dome-like top creaked open. Josh breathed, "What's inside, Grandma? Can I see?"

Inspiration Is Motivation in Motion

Inspiring a love for reading in the children of your classroom is simple when you use the proper set of keys. Parents and teachers unconsciously teach their children what is valuable by the way they spend their own time. The instruction to train up a child in the way he should go encompasses so much more than just the facts of the Gospel. It means to train the child's character, to give him high ideals, to provide largeness of thought, to instill creativity, to nourish the imagination.

Great literature has a way of building great people and a committed teacher can help bend the twig to a love of reading. The home is still the greatest educational force and parents who make reading attractive contribute immeasurably to their child's intellect, emotional stability, and spiritual development. The great teacher can become the arm of the home by employing some simple everyday ideas in the classroom. Any noble book can be used by God in a child's growth for a good book possesses genuine spiritual substance in the

form of universal truths.

Inspiring the love of reading can be accomplished with the aid of different means. Let's call them the keys to inspiration



Read to your class. It doesn't matter the grade level you teach. I've read *Words By Heart* by Ouida Sebesytan to my Senior English class and *Shiloh* by Phyllis Reynolds to my college age Children's Lit. class. Both sets of students couldn't wait to come to class. I didn't assign a report or the like. We impartially enjoyed the wonder of a well-turned phrase, a thought-provoking description, or the sheer silliness of a character's actions. A brief discussion when the book is finished is neat because it gives the students a time to express their enjoyment.



Allow the children in your classroom to catch you reading. Growing up, I saw my mother reading every afternoon, therefore I became an avid reader. When the elementary grades are doing their seat work, you can allow yourself the pleasure of reading at least two pages of a book you think might interest one of the students. Let them ask you questions about why you're reading or what the book is about, but never give away the story line. In the older grades set a classic novel or non-fiction book conspicuously on your desk. Intrigue this group by reading aloud a unique sentence or paragraph.



Schedule a time every day for sustained reading in your class. This works well in all of the elementary grades. Let them bring in their own book to read, but also have a ready supply of good books on hand in your room. In the Jr. and Sr. High grades, plan

to let students read for a set time every Friday. With the pull of television, video games, computers, sports, cheerleading, yearbook, after-school clubs, if we as teachers don't provide a scheduled time to read, reading may not happen at all.



Plan a special event involving reading. Invite a local author to your classroom for a class period. Three years ago, the fourth grade teachers at Rhodes Elementary School asked me to be their Author in Residence for the Read-a-Thon program. I took *Rumpelstiltskin's Daughter* by Paul O. Zelinsky to read to the classes. It's a large book with magnificent artwork. All 60 children crowded into one room. I had memorized the story so that I could hold up the pictures.

The enthralled gaze on their young faces made me so glad the Lord had called me into teaching twenty-eight years ago. I brought *The Great Churchmouse Caper* that I'd had published a year before and gave each child a brand new copy. Mind you these were public school children gratefully receiving a book where the Gospel was carefully woven into the story. Hugs, thank-yous, and Wows! ended a perfect time. To this day as I walk down the hall to my husband's room, children come up and say, "I just read your book! Frankie the Fuse is my favorite character."

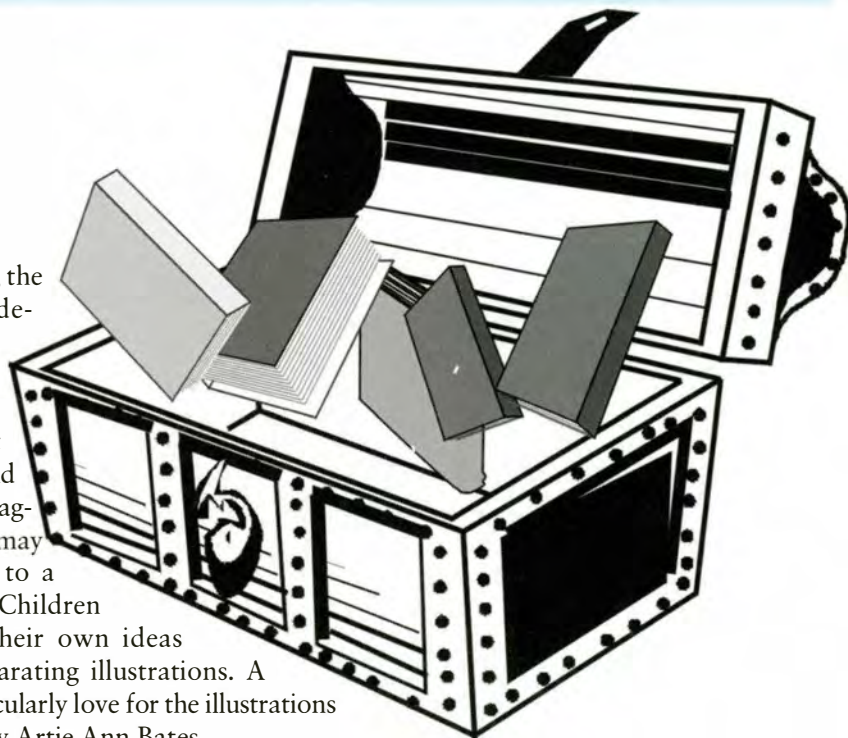


Another special event could be a Walk-to-Read program. Ask your school's principal, the pastor, and any teacher if they will walk a mile for every thousand books the children read. Find a line-drawing of a tennis shoe, copy this, and distribute it among the entire elementary school. This is best if started at the beginning of a semester. As a child finishes a book, he or

she writes the title, author, name, and total page numbers on the tennis shoe. They are to cut it out, color it if they want, and hang it outside your classroom door. At a designated date, take all the shoes down and count them. Have a pre-planned day for the adults to walk and allow the children to tag along.

One school that did this got the local authorities involved to block off a set of streets for the Walk-to-Read. The local newspaper took photos of the event, and each teacher received a copy of the newspaper with their children's pictures and quotations. Anything is more fun when many people are participating.

the artwork, the color, the design of the pages. Do be aware, though, that what you and I think is magnificent art may not appeal to a child at all. Children will have their own ideas about exhilarating illustrations. A book I particularly love for the illustrations is *Ragsale* by Artie Ann Bates.



If the school principal is unable to participate in a school-wide program, create a contest in your own classroom. For elementary students give them a set number of books to read in nine weeks or a semester, depending on the age level. The reward must be big enough to create an atmosphere of excitement. Ask the administration first, but rewards for reading thirty to fifty books could be: a large jar of jelly beans, a day in class to wear a goofy hat, no homework for two nights, a pass to use the computer lab during one class period, a gift certificate to a toy store, or a day to be school principal. For the Jr. and Sr. High, I've used the World's Largest Ice Cream Sundae as a prize. I did enlist the help of parents to help purchase ice cream, toppings, bowls, and spoons. I made this an in-school media event and challenged other classes to top the amount of reading we did.



Bring a book to class every Wednesday, the day I call "hump day." Comment on



Make time for weekly excursions to the library in the younger grades. Often this is set into the schedule already, but if not, make it a priority. When you return to the classroom, allow four to five minutes for them to feed on the book they've just picked. Even in the higher grades, I've made time to visit the library and didn't immediately rush the students away from their books back to the classroom. The key to a love of reading does not turn quickly in the lock. Allow yourself to slow down for a moment.



Please don't make the mistake of saying to a young person of any age, "This is a book you must read!" Ninety-nine percent of the time that must-read book will remain on the shelf.



Summer often finds books gathering dust. Create a reasonable contest for your children. Make certain the goals fit the child's age and the reward something they would

burst to obtain. This can be tracked over the summer with a simple handout sheet for the student to list the title, author, and date of the books he or she read over the summer. Put a box at the end of each line for the initial of a parent or librarian. The next fall, collect the list from those students who remember to return it and create a "Big Deal" with a certificate of accomplishment and a small prize. If done in front of your new students, they will catch the excitement.



Television is the enemy of the mind. It is mere a-musement and means: "to cause to idle away time." Consider thirty minutes of reading for every half hour of television in your own home. You could write an end-of-the-year newsletter to the parents of your students and suggest this idea to them.

The enjoyment of reading is a priceless treasure! Hand the key to all who will reach out and take it.

Focus on Steak or Sizzle?

Clarence Joldersma

(cjolders@calvin.edu),

assistant professor of education at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich., continues the topic of “selling” Christian education to those who might focus on student behavior instead of on an emphasis on a biblical worldview. Tony Kamphuis initiated the topic about the relation between “selling” Christian education and focusing on the school’s own internal vision. The issues he raises in his original posting will continue to face Christian Schools, becoming more pointed and important as we go forward in the 21st century. The panel members hold slightly different views on the topic.

The panel usually consists of:

Pam Adams (padams@dordt.edu) is assistant professor of education at Dordt College, Sioux Centre, Iowa.

Lois Brink (LBrink@grcs.org) is curriculum coordinator and media director at Grand Rapids Christian High School, Grand Rapids, Mich.

Johanna Campbell (ctabc@twu.ca) is executive director of the Christian Teachers Association of British Columbia, Langley, B.C.

Tim Hoeksema (thoeksema@hollandchristian.org) is the principal of Holland Christian High School, Holland, Mich.

Tony Kamphuis (TonyKamp@aol.com) teaches history and business at Smithville District Christian High School, Smithville, Ont.

Tony Kamphuis:

I recently had an interesting discussion with a parent on a field trip. She was unsure about which option — public education or Christian education — she hoped her daughter would choose (note who is making the “purchase decision”) when she arrives at high school age. The lady supports Christian Education, but her older son had gone to a public high school and had fallen in with a great group of Christians in the school’s Intersity group and has a vibrant faith. At the same time, she sees some of our



Tony Kamphuis



Clarence Joldersma

school’s students smoke on sidewalks near the school, has heard they sometimes drink, and once heard language in our parking lot that made her blush. For her the realm of “external behaviors” (and, believe me, I have often wished that our students would behave differently) seemed to outweigh the fact that we have made a concerted effort at our school to show that all of life can and should be influenced by a biblical approach to it. The fact that her child might for hours, every day, be exposed to ideas that are grounded in a naturalistic worldview — ideas that deny either God’s existence or his relevance to most things — seemed less important than that our Christian school wasn’t turning out to be the sort of “angel factory” she had hoped for.

So, why do people choose Christian education? Should we make a more concerted effort to highlight our distinctive philosophy of education? Or are we better off selling ourselves as the school that provides excellent education, is willing to consider uniforms, and endorses “solid discipline policies”? After all, once they are in, we can dazzle them with our solid biblical perspectives, a steak that doesn’t bring in buyers like the sizzle of a focus on “externals” will. Where is the balance here?

Tim Hoeksema:

Tony, if we are talking about how best to “sell” or market our schools, how about HONESTLY?? In a push to increase enrollment, schools — even Christian schools — have a tendency to try to be all things to all people. This only creates problems and a lack of satisfaction on both sides. We need to identify what it is we seek to do, what we do well, and do a good job of articulating the same.

There is a fair amount of variability even between our Christian schools — we have different strengths and weaknesses depending on our size, location, history, — and parents should be presented with this information. Prospective students and parents could make a more informed decision if they spent a little time (a day or two) in each school they were considering. That way they could see the mission of the school in ACTION, rather than reading about it or hearing about it from the principal.



Tim Hoeksema

Tony Kamphuis:

Yeah, I guess you’re right, Tim — honesty is probably the best policy. But there has to be a way to cast the smoking and drinking and (occasional?!) bad language in a positive light (and no, I’m not talking about just the staff here — ha ha)! Maybe a good distract- ing lecture on the integration of the antithesis in our biology cur-

riculum or something like that.

An important caveat: naturally, I want to clarify that I'm not referring exclusively to my own beloved Smithville District Christian High School in these comments, for examples may or may not come from a variety of Christian schools!

Johanna Campbell:

Tony, your final question in your first posting seems to be the answer: Where is the balance? In our Christian schools, the image our students give to the outside is probably the strongest advertising we can offer. Has the biblical worldview worked itself out in a Christ-centered life? That is where the rubber hits the road. Paul writes: "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me — put it into practice" (Phil. 4:9). Another factor to consider is that Christian education does not automatically produce Christian students.



Johanna Campbell

Parents and teachers have the responsibility to pray for the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of their children or students so that the Word heard in all its facets will bear fruit in their lives. In some cases, the fruit is not borne until after the teenage years of turmoil.

We know, too, that uniforms, strict discipline policies, excellent education, biblical integration by themselves do not produce Christ-centered lives. How do we "sell" Christian education? I think we need to honestly present all aspects of our schools to our prospective parents — a balanced picture, in other words. We need to urge them to pray with all their might and then ask them to make a decision before the Lord in the best interest of the child he has entrusted to them. Ultimately it's about God and his work in the hearts and lives of our kids.

Lois Brink:

Johanna, you have said it so well! We are seed planters. We are community builders. We are partners, colleagues, facilitators, agents of renewal. We are not creatures that through behaviorist tactics can be manipulated into loving God or molded into behaving in sinless ways. As teachers and educators, we can accept, love, challenge, laugh with, hold up models, expect, give responsibility. As individuals, we can make a difference in our students' lives. But students' behaviors are not always results of or influenced by schools or even by teachers. As you said, it is the work of the Holy Spirit, and not the school or peer group,



Lois Brink

that makes the difference in the long run.

We need to keep saying this. Especially to aching parents. But as a school we can continue to provide opportunities in our settings for growth, for examination, for renewal. We can also continue to highlight the kids who are showing the fruits of the Spirit. Not just the superstars, but the every-day-making-small-differences kinds of kids. How many small acts of renewal or service opportunities do these kids engage in? How many songs do they sing, prayers do they say; how many kind words of encouragement? How many gentle or bold acts are going on in the classroom or halls? How many intense searchings and discussions between friends? I am talking about the fruits of the Spirit in the small things.

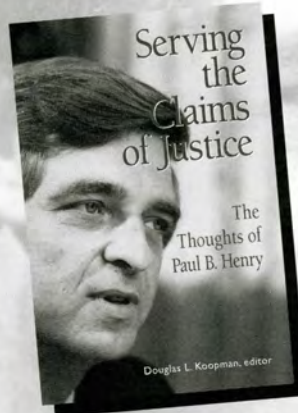
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— Mark O. Hatfield

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The Order of the Soul

by Jack VandenBorn

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

I grew up in Edmonton's hinterland — 50 miles to its north — in a time when pop culture eased into teenage consciousness only via radio. Gogi Grant's "Wayward Wind" quickened a rustic world:

In a lonely shack by a railroad track
He spent his younger days
And I guess the sound of the
outward-bound
Made him a slave to his
wand'rin ways

The wayward wind is
a restless wind
A restless wind that
yearns to wander
And he was born the
next of kin
The next of kin to the
wayward wind

The words and melody spill out easily 40 years later — plaintive still, wistful still, reliving once more the lush anticipation of a future relieved of droning agricultural duties — a future freed from the need of picking rocks from unending greywooded fields, a future relieved of snatching eggs from over-protective, sharp-beaked leg-horns, a future unconfined and unburdened by parental misgivings about worldliness — movies, cards, young love.

I yearned to wander, like the wayward wind, to find affinities in other places, to discover and gather in fresh thoughts, to

experience life as it might be. My father's prayer often included the phrase that this life is nothing but "a vale of tears." I suppose he thought this mainly when praying because he worked the farm with a stern self-discipline. Neither hopelessness nor drudgery bedeviled his work pattern ... or his personality. Together with my mother, my father brought his children to sunny Alberta to create family life in a manner consonant with an unfolding kingdom of the Lord,

weekly "Top Forty" meshed easily in the fecundity of tingling teenage thought — already unwittingly cast in its Kuyperian mould.

Heavenly pleasures

Later, much later, I learned Plato believed a beatific view, perhaps, a beatific condition, was attainable. Not only the Catholic church provides the possibility of beatification. Emigrating from the cave of ignorance required physical ardor, musical cognizance and mathematical finesse — a liberating trinity capable of re-ordering the soul.

But the magnetism of mathematics soon waned in city life while the Platonic spell of exercise remained latent for many years, until the euphoric attractions of jogging and cross-country skiing imprinted themselves on an older and recalcitrant heart. And the swaying, rocking music lost its way in the folds of a new marriage, a teaching career, two children and the allure of "classical music."

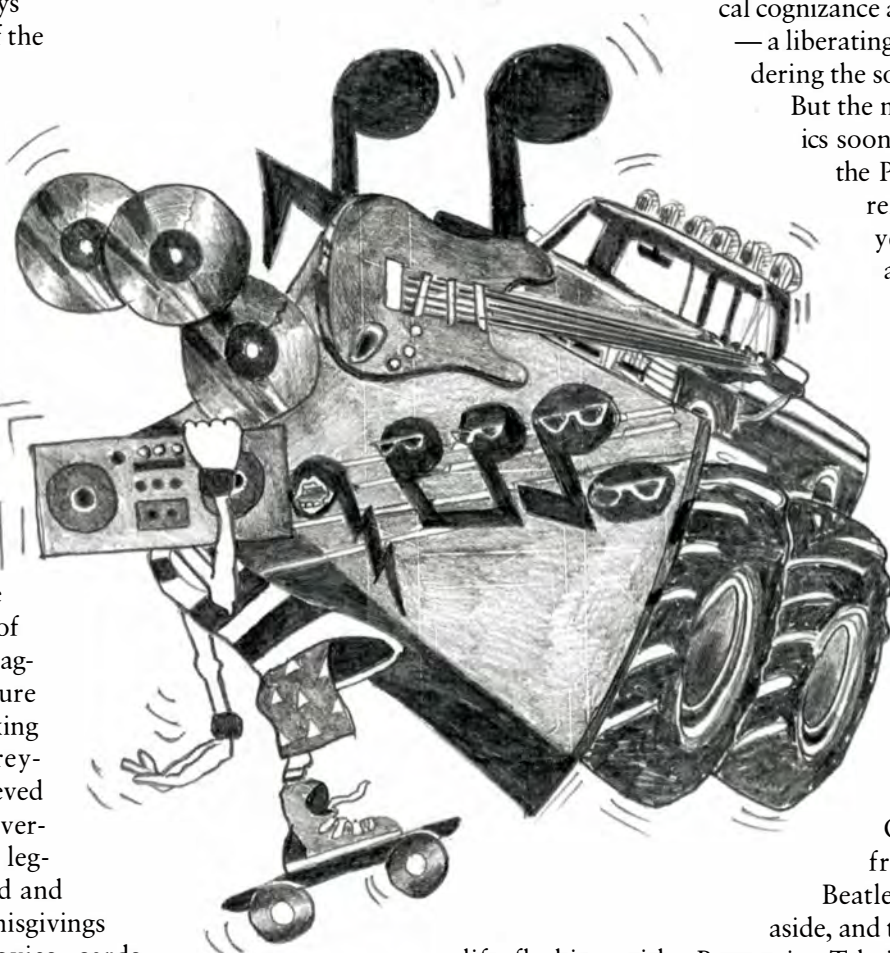
In the middle of the Sixties we'd been given tickets to the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, first-balcony, front-row tickets. The

Beatles pushed our attention aside, and the worlds of Beethoven,

Bernstein, Tchaikovsky, Vivaldi, lulled Avlyn and me into storied delight, upwards and "higherbrowed." The Boston Symphony Orchestra at Tanglewood; shrimp, cheese, bread, fruit, Chardonnay and

a life flashing with accomplishment, and glinted by satisfaction. I wanted that too.

Gogi Grant's "Wayward Wind," Elvis Presley's "Heartbreak Hotel" and the



Leonard Cohen worries over the days ahead.

The blizzard of the world has crossed the threshold and it has overturned the order of the soul.
When they said, "repent" I wonder what they meant.
And now the wheels of heaven stop you feel the devil's riding crop.
Get ready for the future: it is murder.

What good is music in all this? Good music? Beatific visions? The wheels of heaven are stopped; the lash of the devil's riding crop harries our souls. Can't repent, because we don't know what it means. Our collective soul is upside down.

In his "Soundtracking of America" (<http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/2000/03/bottum.htm>), Joseph Bottum, Catholic philosopher, laments the loss of a "public system of belief about the way God and history and the world work." We occupy a constructionist world where each fashions a worldview with which to interact with the world, to create anew the post-modern cave of folly. No common meta-narrative permits escape from the self-made traps.

In this cocktail of rationality, music silts the openings of consciousness. Bottum notes that music made sense when the world did. Now the sense is gone, but the melody lingers on — everywhere... [North] America is drowning in sanctioned music

— an obligatory orchestration cramming every inch of public space.... It's delivered entirely in snippets as we cross from one stereo zone to another — the radio suddenly blaring out as the car starts up, the jukebox suddenly cut off as the door to the diner closes.... Americans seem incapable of going without music.

Bottum's Christianity wants an intellectual coherence in the world, a common base in which music, too, has clear purpose, namely, "to express and, indeed, to perpetuate this shared coherence." His is

splattering events, one that recognizes each exemplar of humanity simultaneously altruistic and noxious, hardly ever just one or the other.

But Bottum pushes our understanding deep into the pulsating heart of music. While he would have the violins, the drums and the songs turn us to commonality, music conveys its rewards below the threshold of consciousness, "certainly outside the pale of discursive thinking," quoting Susanne Langer. Musical notes assign no meaning beyond the sound that passes.

What we hear is what we get. No more.

Even in, say, Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, the ideas it takes 45 minutes to convey amount to little more than winter is cold and summer hot, in spring things grow and in fall they don't. It's not that music doesn't build on ideas, it's just that they're not ideas that mean "ideas" in the usual sense, ideas that we convey with words and pictures. Musical ideas "express musical techniques and music's root mathematical structure, and exactly what they have to do with what we experience while listening is something no one has ever satisfactorily explained." Bottum continues, "[Musical ideas] are like the ideas in chess or math. They don't mean anything, and

have no purpose in and of themselves. It's no accident that child prodigies — with the skill of adults and the experience of children — appear in music, chess, and math but never in poetry or philosophy."

What we experience in music is some-



a Constantinian stance.

I suppose there's a universalizing edge to Kuyperianism, too. It would be my preference that students and adults renovate their worldviews into a more Kuyperian format, one that observes Godly grace

thing else. Music stands, at last, as “evocative” – a word whose only other use is in advertisements for expensive perfume. Music is chess drenched with perfume.

It means there is no pipe organ, no guitar, no saxophone, no Eric Clapton to push the Kuyperian or Christian school agenda. Only words and actions can do that. Music can only be a delight, not a sermon. It caresses our emotionality – reaching behind our rationality deeply into consciousness beyond the reach of language.

While marrying words to music has ontological possibility, the historical legacy is not promising. Bottum observes that in Handel’s *Messiah* God has made the

“rough places plain,” as Handel’s tenor informs the audience – and the word “rough” he trills roughly, and the word “plain” he holds plain. “All we like sheep have gone astray,” the chorus sings from Isaiah 53 – and the singing voices go astray, every one to his own way. It comes across as stupendous. It sounds superb. And considered purely as an idea, it’s on a par with what might occur to a child asked to illustrate with crayons an uplifting text from a second-grade reader.

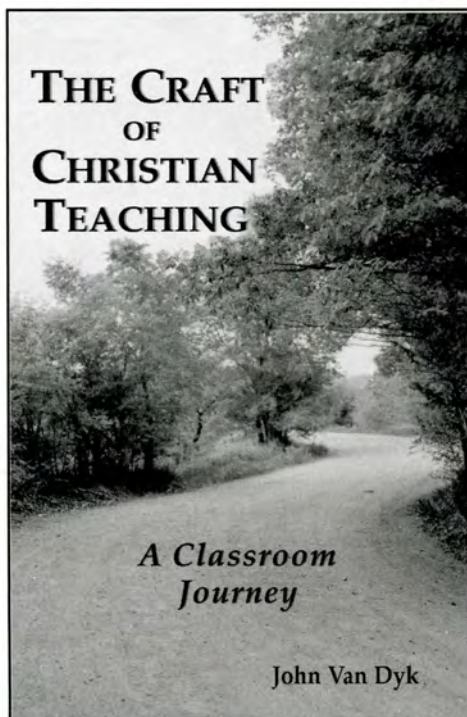
Music’s best shot is hardly an achievement of the intellect. Music can’t do the job words are best at. So listen to Celine Dion’s “My Heart Will Go On,” but don’t

compare it to John Keats “To Autumn”:

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun,
Conspiring with him how to load and
bless

With fruit the vines that round the
thatch-eves run;
To bend with apples the mossed
cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core.

Reading Keats and Kuyper builds a superior order for the soul, at least in Houston, British Columbia..



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Lowell Hagan
Column Editor
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Politics 101: the Presidency

The labyrinthine workings of politics in a representative society are difficult to dramatize, whether in a novel or on film. Conventional storytelling needs a strong plot line. Committee meetings, political horse trading and campaign advertising do not lend themselves to straightforward plot development. Consequently, movies about politics tend to focus on either a single strong personality or a major crisis.

Because of the focus on heroes and major crises, Hollywood films have never been worth much to the teacher of politics and government. Some of the classic films were mere affirmations of the civic faith. The most famous are from warm-hearted, optimistic director Frank Capra who gave us *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), *Meet John Doe* (1941), and *State of the Union* (1948).

More recently, Ivan Reitman's political comedy *Dave* (1993) took a similarly optimistic view of one man's ability to triumph over political corruption and ineptness. These films all worked as statements of faith, but were not much good as primers in the actual operations of government. Films about political crises were more popular in the 1960s.

Fact-based films did not do much better than fictional ones. *All the President's Men*, for example, contributed little to an understanding of politics beyond the specifics of the Watergate scandal. In the end, they all made the same faith statement as the hero-worship films: the system works.

Suitable medium

It turns out, however, that television is ideally suited to do what novels and films cannot do well, which is to dramatize politics, not as hero worship or as crisis management, but as the complex ongoing process of governing a nation. The show that has accomplished this feat is, of course, *The West Wing* (NBC, Wednesdays), now entering its third season.

Created by executive producer Aaron Sorkin, who wrote *A Few Good Men* and the romantic comedy *The American President*, *The West Wing* is quite simply one of the best dramatic series in the history of television, and has rightfully received more honors in less time than any other series. Either of the first two seasons could have been used as the basis for a fairly effective and meaningful course in American politics, and many of its lessons could be extended to almost any representative form of government.

Why does *The West Wing* work so well? In part, the answer is that the television series is better suited to the dramatization of politics than either the novel or the movie. The first advantage is the episodic nature of the television series. Because politics in-

volves complex interrelationships among many people and institutions, it lends itself to a kind of storytelling that interweaves a large number of loosely interconnected stories. Thus a one-hour installment of *The West Wing* may contain three or four five- or ten-minute episodes, most (but not all) of which refer to a single situation or problem.



A second advantage of the television series is its length. So far, 46 episodes of *The West Wing* have been broadcast, with a total running time, minus commercials, of approximately 36 hours, longer than it would take to read even the longest political novel. This enables the series to work on topics that are slow to develop, stories that do not lend themselves to the foreshortened time line of the movie script.

Both the length and the episodic character of a television series create a third advantage that television has over movies, and shares with the novel: the ability to allow full character development for a large number of principals. It was clear that *The West Wing* was going to take full advantage of this characteristic of the television in the first episode, which dared to delay the introduction of the President to the last five minutes.

Brilliant writing

The West Wing has made optimal use of television's storytelling style. To a significant degree, this can be attributed to Aaron Sorkin's brilliant work as the writer of the show. Sorkin has been the principal writer of nearly every episode, giving the series a remarkable consistency of style and characterization. The show includes some of the tightest writing ever found on television. Good writing has become a rare commodity on tele-

vision, particularly in continuing series. A creative English teacher with a VCR could excerpt from almost any episode an example of excellent screen-writing that would stand by itself for study.

A second way in which the show has capitalized on an advantage of television is in the development of a large number of significant characters. President Josiah Bartlett (Martin Sheen) is, of course, central to the series, but rarely dominates an individual episode. There are more than 20 continuing characters, all carefully delineated as distinct individuals. None of them has yet become a predictable stock character, a major achievement in television writing.

Third, Sorkin has made excellent use of continuing stories which slowly develop through the series. One is the state of the President's health. The first-season revelation that President Bartlett suffers from a slow-developing form of multiple sclerosis becomes an issue of conflict over re-election, and a source of tension with his wife Abby (Stockard Channing), who insists that he be a one-term President. Racist opinions are aroused by issues centering around the President's personal aide Charlie Young (Dule Hill), and particularly his romance with the President's daughter Zoey (Elizabeth Bartlett).

Few negatives

Scripts for *The West Wing* have also avoided some of the major pitfalls of series writing. One is the introduction of irrelevant sub-plots for the purpose of stimulating viewer interest. Although the personal lives of the characters are frequently explored, none of these sub-plots has become a separate, unrelated story. There have been no comic-relief stories, no soap opera romances, and above all, no stories that would work just as well in a different series. The focus is always on how these incidents are interwoven with the politics of the Presidency.

A second pitfall avoided so far is the tendency to spend a great deal of time on what is known in the business as "laying pipe." In a typical situation comedy, as much as one-third of an episode's script is devoted to re-establishing the characters so that the viewer learns all the important ingredients of the show in every installment. In the episode "20 Hours in L.A.," presidential aides' concern over Bartlett's demanding schedule is not explained; it is assumed that viewers already know of the President's medical problems.

Strong points

The show has other strengths as well, chief among which is that it makes no attempt to be ideologically neutral. The President is a liberal Democrat, which may betray the political sympathies of the show's creator, but which works dramatically by

creating a clear point of political tension and conflict.

Another strength of the program is its willingness to deal with complex moral and ethical issues without preaching, and without following a predictable party line. Issues such as capital punishment, gun control, the ethics of a military strike, and gay rights are among the many issues that have been considered, and in each case there has been an exploration of opposing opinions. In one episode, a gay congressman supports a bill that would specifically outlaw same-sex marriages.

One other characteristic of President Bartlett makes *The West Wing* particularly interesting for Christian viewers is that he is a devout Catholic. So when he considers whether to commute a death sentence, he consults with his parish priest. When his personal secretary and long-time friend Mrs. Landingham (Kathryn Joosten) is killed in a freak auto accident, he rages against God as only a believer can, in a scene strongly reminiscent of some of the psalms of David.

Power plays

But always there is politics, politics, and more politics. The President and his staff support a gun-control bill that they know will accomplish nothing except some positive public relations; the Vice-President maneuvers for the nomination, assuming that Bartlett will not run again; the President makes a last-minute decision about a Supreme Court nominee because of an obscure article published in the candidate's younger days; a congressman attempts to kill a bill the President favors by attaching an amendment he cannot accept; the President softens his State of the Union address in a way that angers many of his supporters; Deputy Communications Director Sam Seaborn (Rob Lowe) obsesses over the effect of the President's offhand remark that he doesn't like green beans on the Western farm vote; and, in general, the realities of government are subjected to honest scrutiny.

The greatest strength of a civics textbook is also its greatest weakness: in organizing political realities for logical presentation, it makes things appear to be simpler and more straightforward than they are. The political education found in *The West Wing* is non-linear, episodic, and often problematic. That is its strength, and its weakness. The textbook presents government as it is supposed to work. *The West Wing* presents the Presidency as we wish it were.

But in addition to providing a great deal of food for thought, and a reasonably accurate portrayal of the complexities and compromises involved in national politics, it is also just plain good television.

Thinking Thirteen



Nancy Knol
Column Editor
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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.

As teachers, I suspect we all do that mental sorting at the end of each school day — what went right, what went wrong, why we feel less than satisfied, or what it is that is gnawing at us somewhere in the back of our mind, something that needs to be named and settled before returning to work the next day. So much of our day, especially in middle school, is interruption, and perhaps that is what makes us feel the need to collect our thoughts once the interruptions have subsided for the day. But tonight I find that my mental sorting is actually about interruptions.

For example, I am reminded of the interruption of daily announcements. Suddenly the intercom comes on in the middle of devotions or during an explanation of a homework assignment. It drives teachers crazy. Or there is the interruption of a student who suddenly raises her hand in the middle of a discussion, and you are so pleased that this usually reticent girl is going to contribute, and she has only broken in to ask if she can use the bathroom.

Or there is Sam. I am so fond of him. He was in my seventh-grade English class last year, and this year he is in my eighth-grade English class and my study hall. He's so gruff and rude and angry — so bright — but he doesn't get good grades. He resists work actively, but he also reads avidly, and he catches on more quickly than most of his peers. He insults people and speaks in superlatives: "He's the meanest kid in this school." "I hate her more than anybody." He rarely says thank you, but he has many, many demands: "I need to borrow colored pencils, I need to go to the library, I need to know how to spell something, I need to know how to change a sentence in my writing."

I got into the habit of giving him lemon drops early in the morning before school begins, and now he sits on the stool in front of my desk at the beginning of the day, with

his hand outstretched as I try to empty my bag and get organized. Some days I am frantic to get some papers graded or an assignment run off before school begins, and there is Sam, perched on the stool with a sheepish look on his face. He gets his lemon drop, but he remains to talk. He needs somebody to listen. And knowing how he resists intimacy, I should recognize what a privilege his presence there on that stool actually is.

And then there's Marie. She comes into my room with her sour face just as I am ready to run to the teachers' lounge for a quick cup of coffee before break is over. "Read this," she demands — not asks — and I am expected to read yet another note from her about how tragic her life is because her friends have been mean to her.

And I want to tell her how trivial her problems are, and how selfish and rude she is, and that I need to sit with some adults and have a conversation about something that matters. But this does matter to her, and beyond the content of the adolescent note, there is this testing that is going on over whether or not I will dismiss her the way her mother does. And I know how badly she needs to see grace from somebody, and I know God wonders if maybe that could be me.

And it occurs to me as I write this that all the interruptions are about people, and usually what they are interrupting is simply paper work. C.S. Lewis once said that the interruptions are the most important part of our day. Well, those of us who teach middle school might forget that sometimes. But I think I will try to remember that the next time I buy those lemon drops.

Those Blessed Interruptions!

Comments from Principals on Our Journal

Earlier this year we sent out an e-mail letter to many principals of Christian schools. We used the Christian Schools International Directory to find as many e-mail addresses as we could. Some e-mail addresses were wrong or have since changed. Some schools list no e-mail address. We apologize for not having been able to contact all principals of schools that receive our journal. We found the comments we received both heartening and instructive. We also realize that we are competing for time with many teacher duties. Let's not give up on the need to be refreshed and challenged.

BW

I don't really have a lot to say but your magazine is appreciated. I know that there are discussions about articles in the staff lounge and that is worthwhile. Keeps us talking professional topics and discussing the challenges of teaching. Possible topics for future issues: the problems of technology in education, releasing of staff and the trauma that takes place when not all the info. can be shared.

**Robert Terpstra, Principal, Dutton Christian School
Caledonia, Michigan**

I'm very pleased with the magazine. I like the theme approach. Thanks for your work.

**Dave Wagner, Principal, New Era Christian School,
New Era, Michigan**

I use the journal for research, in-services and staff meetings. I quote from it in our weekly Courier to parents. There are a lot of relevant items needed to be presented in a Christian Journal. Christian schools are becoming more diverse and there are challenges that we need to meet head on.

**Judi Miller, Administrator, Cathedral Christian Academy
Sylvania, Ohio**

Thank you for your work with CEJ. At present it is simply distributed to staff. We have not made much of discussing the issues or themes presented in the various articles. CEJ has been used only by individuals at present. We have a ways to go in using your excellent resource to its full potential.

**Stan Baker, Principal, Immanuel Christian School
Oshawa, Ontario**

So far, since you have become editor, I've taken notice of your language, which promotes your world view and heritage. In some ways, I admire your honesty, but, in other ways, we must be sensitive to other Christian world views that may or may not be

present in our community. Unity may be better served by emphasizing Christian approaches as a first priority thereby transcending denominational distinctives. I greatly appreciated the Wolters manuscript delivered in Korea at the time of the millennial talk. It was clear and articulate and promoted the distinctives of biblical interpretation in a respectful and direct manner. I like the modern issue format with your five educational views. It's smart and effective.

**John Reems, Principal, Nanaimo Christian School
Nanaimo, British Columbia**

On April 30, we discussed the CEJ February, 2001, issue. The theme was Spiritual Report Card. We had a very lively discussion on the article by Paul Theule called "Eye-balling Spiritual Health at School." We tried to cover the whole issue but discovered that it was not possible. Someone asked, "How different is our report card from the one that they have in the public school system? Do we measure spirituality?" We couldn't come up with any answers that satisfied everyone. We then decided to discuss Dan Vander Ark's book called *Mission to Measurement* at our staff study meetings next year. Maybe Dan will shed some light on the issue. We got a kick out of Pigskin Piety at the Pole because a number of clear points were scored by author Jan Kaarsvlam.

**Chris VanderVeen, Principal, Brantford Christian School
Brantford, Ontario**

We don't use the CEJ in any communal way. From time to time the teachers will remark to me and/or to each other that a particular article was timely to their teaching situation. Your February 2000 theme regarding bullies was a timely issue because I was dealing with that problem at the time, and I anticipate having that problem again in the new school year.

**Ken Kramer, Principal, Sheboygan Christian School
Sheboygan, Wisconsin**

I have seen (and read) the new feature by Clarence Joldersma. It has been interesting. I've also noticed the "theme" approach to the magazine and agree that is a good method to use.

Presently I have no original or creative ideas for improving the magazine. Sadly, perhaps, I think we almost take it for granted and don't appreciate all the time, effort, and work that is needed to produce such a magazine on a regular basis. I'll take this opportunity to say "thanks" for your work and for providing our teachers with a Christian magazine they can call their own.

**Ronald Holwerda, Principal, Lansing Christian School,
Lansing, Illinois.**



I enjoyed your editorial on teaching from the *Catcher in the Rye*. Trying to walk the balance between keeping our thoughts on what is pure and true and admirable (Phil. 4:8) while looking for redeeming elements in the world so as to teach discernment and develop “world influencers” is a monumental challenge. Thanks for voicing your view. I also enjoyed the articles on music. It followed shortly after a stern “lecture” I gave our high school students for “having no song.” One of my favorite pieces is the series of articles that are a bit tongue in cheek involving Rex Kane and his cohorts. The issues they discuss in the faculty lounge are very thought-provoking. This is my 16th year in Christian education. Only this winter did I begin appreciating what the *Christian Educators’ Journal* had to offer. Perhaps you need a certain degree of maturity to appreciate it.

**Randy VanDyk, Administrator, Manhattan Christian School
Manhattan, Montana**

We love the magazine and appreciate it deeply. The discussion column moderated by Professor Joldersma has been read, and teachers will often comment on it. Most say that they’ll read it if the topic of the discussion pertains to themselves or their particular interests, but skip it if the topic isn’t pertinent. In regards to our use of it, we don’t make any official use of it as a staff in meetings, but I know that it is read by all, and some mention using ideas from the magazine in their pedagogy. The most frequently suggested ideas are centering around practical ideas for dealing with classroom issues, a love for the Reformed perspective in all articles, and ideas for units of study with some resources (we swap a lot of ideas around in our Northwest CSI area).

**Jim Buss, Principal, Ebenezer Christian School
Lynden, Washington**

The articles that struck chords with some of our staff were those dealing with controversial topics such as homosexuality, the origins of the earth and dinosaurs. Our staff agreed that there should be caveats or disclaimers on such articles lest the articles’ presence be misinterpreted as consent from all of the members of our organization for the opinions expressed.

**Bob Moore, Principal, Heritage Christian School
Lindsay, Ontario**

The *Christian Educators Journal* is often the only professional reading our overworked teachers do. As principal I often refer to and use articles from your magazine at our staff meetings to spark discussion and reflection. The article I recently used was *Penetrate the Mundane*. We find the magazine informative, chal-

lenging, and at times even reassuring. Please keep the articles coming. I personally enjoyed the reflections on the Toronto purge and your editorial on what once was Eden Christian College.

**Bill Barneveld, Principal, John Knox Christian School
Woodstock, Ontario.**

I’ve surveyed my staff with your questions, and here’s what they say: Eight out of 18 have read the recent discussion column moderated by Joldersma. All eight said the column was good. Nine of the 18 said they find the journal helpful. The other nine haven’t been reading it. They do like the thematic approach to issues. Nine of the 18 said they find the journal helpful to their teaching. The articles in the recent past that were most helpful were the ones on music, post-modernism, the media page, athletics (a Christian attitude toward competition). Suggestions for improvement: the format is kind of dull, but on the other hand, the low budget is appreciated.

**Paul Theule, Principal, Calgary Christian High School
Calgary, Alberta**

Our teachers get the magazine, but at this point there is no formal effort to incorporate it into a staff meeting or similar such gathering. I would be interested in getting some feedback on how other schools use it. I think the magazine does a good job of hitting current topics and issues that lend themselves to discussion, so it should be something that we use more. As is the case with so much in our lives, we need to carve out the time for things, and we find ourselves swamped with plenty of great materials and ideas, but how do you get a staff together when they feel overtaxed and certainly don’t mind telling you so?

**Eleanor Den Hartigh, Superintendent
Ontario, California**

I have seen the discussion column and like it. We find that the *Christian Educators Journal* is scholarly, practical and useful for staff devotions. It is also useful in education committee meetings regarding trends in Christian schools. The staff is encouraged to use it in their teaching. I especially enjoy the articles on computer technology.

**Mark Vander Laan, Principal, Rimbey Christian School
Rimbey, Alberta**

My staff would like to see web page links to a variety of teacher sites, especially those that might have teacher lesson plans and ideas. They liked the theme-based issues.

**Gary Cookson, Hospers Christian School
Hospers, Iowa**

"Slouching Toward Bedlam"

SOLD SIX HUNDRED CANDY BARS —

by Jan Kaarsvlam

After a misunderstanding with Daystar Christian School involving a field trip through Chicago's storm sewer system, Jan Kaarsvlam has recently accepted a position teaching a combined third- and fourth-grade class for the Pella Christian School System in Pella, Iowa.

It always seemed to Jane VanderAsh that every minute she spent in the teacher's lounge of Bedlam Christian High School, the high-energy frenzy of the students faded away a little and the pressure on her head eased a bit. Jane had one more year to go before she retired, and, though she would be able to say honestly at the retirement dinner that she loved kids and loved teaching, she found that lately her love for quiet activities like gardening and stamp collecting seemed to be eclipsing her fondness for teenagers.

Then came a knock at the door. Since only a student would knock before entering, no one immediately moved to answer it. Finally, Maxwell Prentiss-Hall, the newer of the two counselors (and a bit of a pushover in Jane's opinion) crossed to the door. He spoke briefly with the student, then turned to the staffroom to announce, "Hey guys! It's Trent Barner! He's selling candy to raise money for the swim team. Can anybody help him out?" Then, in a whisper, Maxwell added, "It would be good for his self esteem."

Gordon Winkle, the buffalo-like shop teacher, began elbowing people out of the way at the mention of the word "candy." Most of the rest of Bedlam's staff continued to munch on the day-old doughnuts left over from the previous night's school board meeting. Jane was fuming. She tried to keep her voice down as she said to no one in particular, "More fundraising? It's only been a month and a half since school began, and I've had to buy tulip bulbs for the track team, calendars for the service club, candles for the chapel drama team, and cheese popcorn from the pom-pom squad. And I hate cheese popcorn!"

At that point, Rex Kane pushed past Trent Barner to enter the lounge. "Hey, cheese is good for you!" Rex was wearing a blue sweatshirt that had a rip running from his shoulder to halfway down his sleeve. Everyone in the room wondered what had happened, but was afraid to ask.

Jane snorted at Rex, then continued: "The point is, these kids are students. That's supposed to be their focus. I don't understand why we can't just put this extra money onto the tuition bill or something and leave people alone. Or at least ask someone other than teachers. It's not like we have much of a disposable income."

As if to punctuate that point, Gregg Mortis, who had followed

Gordon Winkle and was just completing his purchase of two Crispy Crackly Bars, asked for a receipt, for tax purposes.

Rex moved further into the room and chose to pick up the trail of Jane's conversation. "What's the matter, VanderAsh, afraid to show a little support? So the kids have to raise a little money — it'll be good for them — give them a taste of the real world. And anyway, it's just a couple of candy bars, for pete's sake. Besides," he added loudly, "like Maxwell says, it will be good for the kid's self-esteem." At the door, Trent Barner blushed.

Jane was too angry to avoid a reply, "What does the swim team need money for anyway? They use the pool over at Kennedy High, and I assume they buy their own suits. Do they have to pay for their own water or something?"

Rex looked momentarily thoughtful, then became distracted by a loose thread on his sweat jacket. He began pulling on it and Jane watched, fascinated, as the seam of his jacket began to unravel.

Gordon Winkle, back at the table, pointed a thick, chocolate-smearing finger at Jane. "You just have it in for the sports program. You wouldn't complain if kids were selling candy for the orchestra or choir or something artsy-fartsy like that."

"That is NOT true," Jane insisted, perhaps a bit too emphatically. In a school that Jane felt overemphasized sports, she had frequently made a point in this very room of the fact that she had never attended a school football game or basketball game.

"Methinks the lady doth protest too much," said Greg Mortis as he returned to his seat, pulling back the gold foil from his chocolate bar and taking a bite. "Face it, Jane, your attitude about sports precedes you." He took another bite of chocolate. "Mmmm, these are good. You should really buy one. Besides, they're tax deductible."

"I'm not going to buy one," snorted Jane, "and I'm not going to give in on this argument. Forget the swim team for now. Let's talk about the Future Scientists and Engineering Team. Nobody does more fundraising than them, and they have nothing to do with sports."

At the mention of the science team, knowing smiles flickered around the table. The Future Scientists and Engineering Team was Zelda Roberts' baby. She seemed to care for nothing else. The team, composed of an elite group of students culled from Honors Physics and A.P. Chemistry, competed in regional and national tournaments. Last February they had traveled to Anaheim, California, for a competition at Disneyland. The students on the team seemed to be engaged in non-stop fundraising to support their frequent travels.

"Hey, that science team, they're pretty good," said Rex. "They've won some pretty big hardware, and Roberts says a lot

I'm Going to Disneyland

of those kids have even gone on to graduate school to study science. That's great. Especially for geeks who couldn't make it in athletics."

The conversations halted momentarily as everyone stared at Rex, but he was oblivious. "Hey, Mortis, give me a chunk of that candy bar."

"It is a good program for *everyone*," said Jane, casting a look of disdain toward Rex, "but is the program only for those who are willing to sell stuff?"

"You don't have to sell anything to be on the team," said Prentiss-Hall. "Zelda has assured me."

"Maybe you don't have to go by the rule, but there is still tremendous pressure to do so. If the team makes a trip and a student doesn't cover his costs through the fundraisers, then he has to pay out of pocket. For our students from families with less money, that's not an option. In other words, the students are forced to sell trinkets and junk food or to drop off the team. That doesn't sit right with me."

"Yeah," said Winkle, "but you can't tack on those costs to tuition. Not everyone wants to pay so that 15 kids can travel with the science team. And if you don't cover the costs with tuition, the money has to come from somewhere. Otherwise the program, a good program, dies."

"I think Zelda would die first," said Mortis with a smile.

"Listen," said Rex. He had gathered a sizable ball of thread in his hand and the seam of his sweat jacket had correspondingly been vanishing at an alarming rate. "Doesn't the Bible say, 'The Lord helps those

who help themselves'?"

"That was Ben Franklin," said Jane.

"You sure? I thought it was in Hezekiah somewhere. Anyway, I think kids selling stuff is good for them. It teaches them what's important in life. That's what I say."

"But we've been trying to teach them the opposite of that, Rex. The Positive School Climate Committee has identified materialism as a significant problem here at Bedlam. We tell our kids to be satisfied with what they have, tell them that money isn't what's important in life, then tell them to get out there and sell, sell, sell, so they can go to Disneyland? Where is that in our mission statement?" Jane realized she had been raising her voice to Rex

and now the entire room had fallen silent.

"Hey, there, settle down little filly!" said Rex, yanking on the thread in an attempt to break it, but only pulling more thread. "I think there's two things that are important here. First, I think you ought to consider the parable of the talents. After all, no pain, no gain. And second, Disney was the company that did that movie with Moses in it, you know, *The Lord of the Flies*. So they can't be all bad. At that moment, to punctuate his statement, Rex yanked on the thread, causing the sweat suit jacket to fall off his body in two places, revealing a tee-shirt that said, "Fight Gravity!"

While everyone else laughed, Jane shook her head, sipped her coffee, thought about her books of stamps at home, and reckoned that perhaps it was not teenagers after all that had her contemplating retirement so frequently these days.



Query

Tena Siebenga-Valstar is a former teacher and principal, working on her Ph. D. thesis. If you wish to submit a question for this column, send it to her at 168 Windsor Dr., Fort McMurray, Alta., T9H 4R2 or e-mail her at: valstar@telusplanet.net.



*Tena Siebenga-Valstar
valstar@telusplanet.net*

Feedback hurt teacher

Question #1:

A teacher was undergoing an evaluation which includes written feedback from parents. A parent, unaware that the teacher would be reading the letter, was embarrassed in finding out that the teacher had read the letter. The teacher on the other hand felt unsupported when the administration did not take steps to heal the broken relationship. What can be done to build trust between teacher/administration and parents?

Response:

The aim of evaluation is to help the teacher be the best teacher possible for the ultimate good of the students served. This situation indicates the necessity of a clearly defined teacher evaluation policy made available to the teacher and parents, as well as to the administration. When parents are asked to participate in the process they must fully understand their role in it. As Christians we must be mindful of the Matthew 18 principle which indicates our requirement to discuss our disagreement with the person involved before we discuss it with anyone else. It appears that this has implications for this scenario. A parent should have discussed the disagreements with the teacher and tried to resolve them prior to writing them in an evaluation which could defame the teacher. The discussion which could have occurred would likely have led to greater understanding. Understandably the teacher felt betrayed by the parent without having a chance to explain him or herself, and, similarly, the parent was embarrassed not realizing the teacher would read the information.

Realizing the situation, the administrator could have served as a reconciling agent by explaining the situation, admitting the discomfort was caused by a failure of parties being adequately informed, and aiding in bringing the teacher and parent together

to talk about the situation.

It appears that because the situation was not being resolved by others, the teacher has to take the first step, as difficult as that may be. "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault..." (Matthew 18:15). When one's hope is for greater understanding as well as respect for the other person as an image bearer, God blesses our efforts. When we go into a situation knowing that we must forgive, not because we want to, but because Christ calls us to do so, we can be assured that peace will ultimately be ours and healing will take place. When we forgive, the healing starts in our own life and allows us to move on. If I understand the scenario correctly, this teacher will have to go through the same process with the administrator. God's grace allows us to move on.

Frustrated with ADD

Question #2:

I am teaching an upper elementary boy with learning problems stemming from Attention Deficit Disorder, Fetal Alcohol Effect or a combination of the two. He was adopted by his parents when he was five years old and appears to have had a difficult time in school. As teachers we have tried our best, but sometimes it becomes too much when he becomes aggressive, physically hurts others and uses vulgar talk. I've sent him to the principal who may suspend him, but when he returns I still have to deal with him. How do I do more than cope?

Response:

Behavior exhibited by children with Attention Deficit Disorder is characterized by inattention, hyperactivity and impulsiveness. Since the 1940s, varying labels have been given to children who exhibit these characteristics reflecting the uncertainty researchers have about the underlying causes of the disorder (Barkley, Russel, Sept./98, *Scientific America*). Barkley believes the disorder has a genetic cause: developmental failure in the brain circuitry that underlies inhibition and self-control. This in turn impairs other important brain functions crucial for maintaining at-

tention, including the ability to defer immediate rewards for later, greater gain. He states that since boys are genetically more prone to disorders of the nervous system, more boys than girls are diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder, and more boys with ADD give expression to impulsive, disruptive behavior than do girls. Boys also may exhibit other conditions such as learning disability or oppositional defiant disorder. They may overreact or lash out when they feel bad about themselves. They can be stubborn, explosive, belligerent or defiant.

Teachers, parents, administrators and health professionals must work together to give the child the greatest success in recognizing and using the gifts with which God has blessed him. Teachers and parents need training in specific and effective ways of managing the behavioral problems associated with ADD. This involves making the consequences of the child's actions more frequent and immediate and increasing the external use of prompts and cues about rules and time intervals. Because the child cannot do so, others must aid the child in anticipating events, breaking tasks into smaller and more immediate steps, and using artificial immediate rewards. These steps help the child develop patterns and routines, developmental steps of which he is incapable on his own.

Medication may be prescribed for greater concentration. Counseling or group sessions may help the child improve social skills. Self-monitoring strategies have to be taught and reinforced. Having one playmate rather than having to contend with a group may also help the child cope.

Good teaching strategies with specific adaptations for this boy may be necessary. Set him in an area free of distractions and provide space where he can move around and release energy. Establish a clearly posted system of rules and reward appropriate behavior. Sometimes keeping a card or a picture on his desk will remind him of appropriate behavior such as raising his hand rather than shouting out or staying in his desk rather than wandering about. Tell the class in advance what you intend them to learn from the lesson. Provide visual cues as well as oral instructions, allow the child to repeat key parts of the lesson, review instructions to written assignments, review which books or materials are needed for the assignment, frequently ask, "Are you paying attention or thinking of something else?" This child may need more time for assignments or tests or may have to have the test given orally. Some schools are able to provide smaller classes which are less competitive and are more supportive in that individualized instruction can be given.

Parents and teachers can help by providing the structure and assisting him to develop strategies to use when facing frustrating situations. Children with ADD cannot curb their immediate re-

action; they don't think before they act, but we can help them develop strategies so they can cope and use the gifts they have been given. We can create steps rather than be a stumbling block.

First-year challenge

Question #3:

Sometimes when I am discussing a student's misbehavior with a parent, the parent answers, "He's just like that at home, too. Really, we don't know what to do with him. We've tried everything." I never know how to respond. I'm only a first-year teacher and I need some wisdom!

Response:

Fortunately, the parents recognize the problem, so rather than denying its existence are seeking help in dealing with it. You probably have tried a number of strategies and so would be able to relate what you have tried with or without success. You may have compared notes with previous teachers as to what they have found was effective with this child. You may have to determine from the parents whether this is a recent behavior or if it is ingrained over a number of years. Are the parents resigned to the fact that this is "just how the child acts" or do they want to see changes? Determine what they have done. Following the information gathering, determine together what specific behavior you will both work on, what method both of you will use, and for what time period you will do this. Decide on your method of communication (phone, e-mail or notebook sent back and forth with the child), so the child also knows that both of you are working with him to improve this behavior. That's a beginning. When the student has success in one area, you can together approach another.

Readers' Response

Arrogance of "Reformed" remains a *stumbling* block

It was good, after a very busy end to the school year, to finally have the opportunity to begin catching up on some reading, including the February edition of the CEJ. While I found many of the articles to be insightful (as usual), I was somewhat disturbed by one particular incorrect assumption/conclusion in your editorial which, in my opinion, is just a symptom of a greater problem. (Yes, I am going to do what I perhaps ought not to; that is, respond to that small point which disturbed me rather than the large part which did not.)

Having never been part of any Christian school "community" until two years ago (nor having ever been part of a "Reformed" congregation), it has been quite interesting to learn more about the "Reformed" view on many issues, but chiefly on education. In attending OCSTA conventions, reading publications like CEJ, and discussing with some colleagues, I have learned that it is the "Reformed" perspective that "all of life, all of education, is religion, is worship of God" (to quote your editorial in the February edition of CEJ). I think that is just right on!

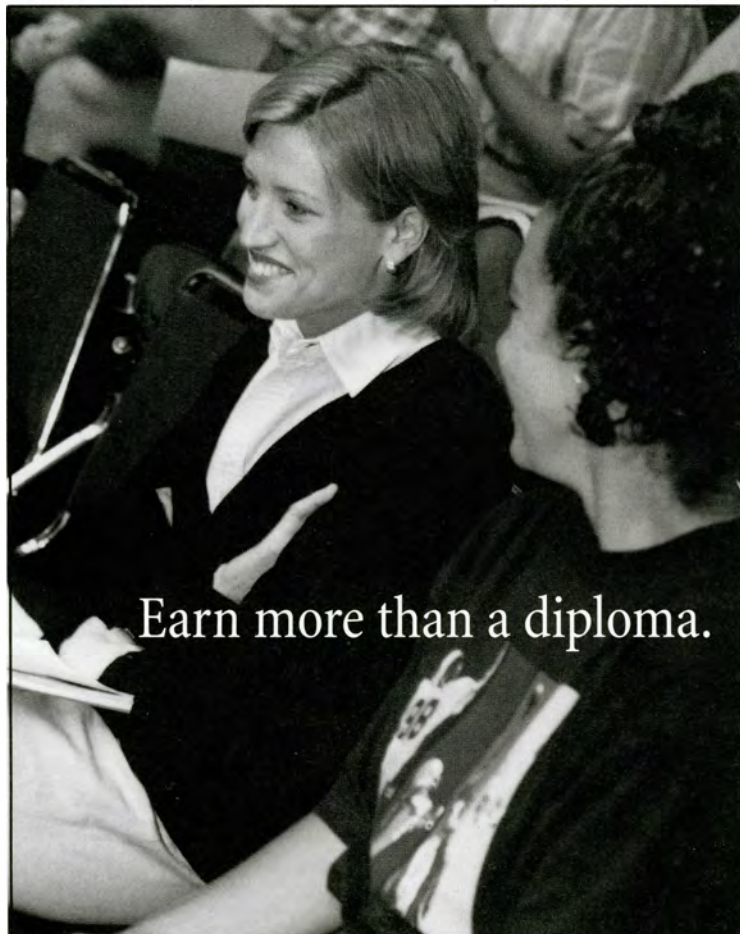
Yet, to listen to or read about the "Reformed" view from some of the afore-mentioned sources (including the CEJ), I get the impression that people in the "Reformed" churches are the only ones who believe that faith in Christ is intrinsic to everything we do and that the "Reformed" view is that other Christians have a deficient theology. This is what I see to be a larger issue high-

lighted by one small example in your editorial.

This idea of the superiority of the "Reformed" tradition appears to rear its ugly head in your generalizations about Anabaptist views, based on a brief look at (the formerly Mennonite) Eden high school. While I am not a member of the Mennonite denomination that founded Eden and then made a very difficult decision to allow Eden to become part of the public school system, I was deeply disturbed that you would assume or conclude from this example that the Anabaptist view is anything less than that "all of life, all of education, is religion, is worship of God." Admittedly, most Anabaptist (mainly Mennonite) churches do not teach that Christian families must always send their children to Christian schools. However, to then imply in your conclusion that Anabaptists are any less serious about teaching their children to worship God in all aspects of life (which is spiritual worship, according to scriptures) is simply false.

Furthermore, I would argue that a major reason that many Christians do not join the mainly "Reformed" (at least here in Ontario) Christian school movement is just such an arrogance on the part of some people from the "Reformed" tradition.

This is not to say that I believe people from "Reformed" congregations to be mostly prejudiced and hypocritical. Nor do I believe that they should not have started Christian schools. On the contrary, I have several colleagues from the "Reformed" tra-



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dition, none of whom have shown themselves to harbor such destructive attitudes. Furthermore, the school in which I teach (which is one of a minority of OACS schools begun by parents outside the "Reformed" tradition) is a good example of how Christians from various different backgrounds can work together in offering Christian education. In addition, I strongly believe that God is using these same schools in a growing movement away from the public school system which is constantly becoming more anti-Christian.

In conclusion, keep thinking and praying about what Christian education is to be, and keep challenging all of us to greater faithfulness in this great endeavor.

Arlie Peters
Ottawa, Ontario

Editor's Note: If in my editorial I gave the impression that the Reformed tradition is superior to the Anabaptist tradition or that Anabaptist people are not serious about teaching their children about God's claim for all of life, I apologize. I do not believe that.

I meant to focus on the Reformed view of education, which, in my opinion, is to be preferred to the Anabaptist view, which does not emphasize a need for Christian schools.

BW

Dinosaurs on Your Coffee Table

For all those who said "No" or a "Definite Maybe" to the affirmation by Stegink and Van Woerkom that the dinosaurs lived long before there were human beings (See "Adam and the Dinosaurs" in CEJ's December 2000 issue), and to all who are interested in dinosaurs for whatever reason, I recommend the book *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Dinosaurs* by David Norman. It is published in London by Salamander Books, 1985; available in the USA through Outlet Book Co., a Division of Random House, Inc., 40 Engelhard Ave., Avenal, New Jersey 07001. This book is suitable for your personal library, the bookshelf in your classroom and as a "coffee table" volume.

Clarence Menninga, Professor of Geology, Emeritus
Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan

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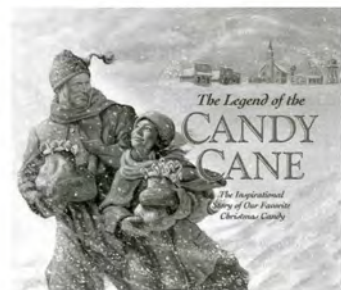
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Book Review

Anthony J. Diekema. *Academic Freedom and Christian Scholarship*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans. 2000. 194 pages plus bibliography and reading list.

Reviewed by Steve J. Van Der Weele, Professor of English (emeritus), Calvin College.



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The ex-president of Calvin College has used his time since retirement in a good cause. He has read extensively, visited other colleges and countries, and conversed with many scholars to define for both Christian and secular academia what scholarly freedom means in our time. The book is a rousing manifesto for integrity among all the branches of scholarly effort — presidents, faculty, scholars, community, professional organizations, and, in the case of Christian colleges, the Church.

The book is timely. The disarray of society comes to a focus on the academic enterprise, which provides the thought structures for the larger world. Academic pathology eventually affects the larger world of which it is a part. The distortions, inertia, timidity, special interest groups, and ideological power struggles which occur in education eventually work their way into the minds and hearts of the rest of the population. What may seem abstractions to the lay person eventually become realized in concrete fashion in the life of the non-academic world.

Many crucial components of academic freedom apply to both secular and Christian colleges. Presidents and administrators need to provide an ambience for scholars to pursue their studies without paralyzing distractions from zealots who oppose the direction and the conclusions of those who are conscientiously pursuing truth.

Faculty members must regard their vocation as a high and noble calling — the exploration of this amazing world in which we have been placed. Self-interest will vitiate their work and deprive the student of the teacher's best efforts. Faculty need to respect each other, even when disagreements occur. They must now, in our time, accept the consensus that the Enlightenment has run its course — that it is no longer tenable for them to suppose that truth can be arrived at by pure reason alone, devoid of any context or in isolation from a world view, however incomplete that worldview, "a way of thinking about life and the world in its broadest dimensions." (44) They must not yield, either, to the lure of post-modernism, the movement which, though it legitimizes points of view, including religion, that have been denied a hearing in the past, nevertheless, denies, in its most virulent form, the possibility of attaining truth and tries to establish a special interest — gender, a political point of view, social orientation — as a dominant study. They must, further, regard themselves as members of a community, encouraging and supporting each other in a spirit of fairness to achieve the mission of the college.

Diekema finds the work of Emile Durkheim valuable here. Durkheim defines community "in the context of the culture and ethos that it develops and then defends by an evolving moral order." (39) Durkheim concerns himself with the shared ideas,

beliefs, sentiments and interests which constitute the moral order which shapes and nurtures the behavior of its members. Finally, the tenure faculty members have been awarded (he questions whether tenure is really necessary) should not be merely the achievement of job security but a spur to even greater excellence in academic statesmanship.

What remarkable changes would occur in many places were this wisdom broadly disseminated not only in our institutions of learning, but schools at every level. But President Diekema — note the title of his book — relates freedom to theological issues — issues not ordinarily included in secular discourse about academic freedom. For one thing, he keeps returning to the role of world view. Though a term familiar to the theologically aware, the myth persists that mankind can achieve insights unrelated to larger structures of knowledge or to ultimate ends and purposes of human life, that truth can be unbiased, objective, and devoid of any moral component. Christian scholars have been better taught. The Pauline injunction that all things cohere in Christ is a lively operating principle in their scholarly work.

Diekema writes movingly when he defines the privilege of the scholar. The scholar receives a calling — a high calling to explore the creation we receive as a gift. We honor its creator in our discoveries, and we have not finished our task until we have somehow related our findings to God's larger purposes and meaning for humankind. Thus, the scholar assumes the role of servant-partner as he or she discloses facets of creation which have not yet been discovered or received their due. For a scholar to do less is to live beneath his or her privilege.

To do his work, the Christian scholar may find himself at odds with prevailing ideas in the Christian community. Diekema discusses the several well-known disputes that arose during his tenure and explains how he handled these cases — always giving the scholar the benefit of the doubt. Thus, he has a word of wisdom for the Christian community. The members of that community should develop a mind of trust rather than of fear, and express gratitude for those who are called to explore the many facets of this creation.

Academic freedom, then, is a particular form of freedom — not the freedom guaranteed by law, or the freedom that anything may be said and done on a campus. It is, in its highest form, an extension of Christian freedom based on Scripture itself, shaped and directed by the wisdom and passion shared by community, administration, and committed scholar. Diekema's book is a stirring call to action. With almost a Miltonic passion he summons us all to a life of joyful obedience in the work of Christian scholarship. It deserves a wide reading.

Warren A. Nord and Charles C. Haynes, *Taking Religion Seriously Across the Curriculum*. Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. 1998, 220 pages.

Reviewed by Robert Keeley, Professor of Education, Calvin College.

Who is Eleanor of Aquitaine? If one reads one of the high school history textbooks surveyed by Warren Nord and Charles Haynes, he or she might come to the conclusion that Eleanor was twice as influential as Jesus Christ. At least in that particular textbook she is given twice as much space. Even when Jesus is mentioned in history texts, most refer to his teachings about love and forgiveness and never get around to mentioning that his followers believe that he is God Incarnate. In *Taking Religion Seriously Across the Curriculum*, Nord and Haynes cite this as one example among many examples of how religion has been marginalized in U.S. public schools.

The authors point out that religion has been deleted not only from history classes but that it is absent in all kinds of classes where it ought to be present. They make a convincing argument that the absence of religion across the curriculum in public schools seriously short-changes students. They write that "one can't be an educated human being without understanding a good deal about religion" (35) and argue that on civic, constitutional and educational grounds religion must be included in the curriculum of our schools.

Seven of the nine chapters of this book address specific curricular issues centering on specific disciplines. Although it would be impossible for a book of this sort to give specific curricular suggestions, Nord and Haynes do a good job of addressing some specific issues with a good deal of insight. In their discussion of literature, for example, one might expect them to jump at the chance for a course in the Bible as literature. Although they applaud the idea of studying religious texts, they caution that studying these texts as mere literature misses the point. "The *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Song of Songs* are not simply, or even primarily, literary or historical texts; they are Scripture. That is, they are texts that people within a tradition take to provide an understanding of God and their rela-

tionship to God" (127). They suggest that reading these texts only as literature makes as much sense as reading poetry as if it were prose; we could do it, but we would miss a crucial dimension of it.

The authors discuss how, in addition to history and literature courses, religion should be included in elementary classrooms and in the arts, civics, economics, and the sciences. They also include a chapter on how religion should inform moral education.

They believe that religion is such an important part of life and society that they would require all high school students to take a full year of the study of religions.

Astronomer Arthur Eddington once told about a fisherman who used a net with a three-inch mesh. After a lifetime of fishing in this manner, he came to the conclusion that there were no fish shorter than three inches in length. Nord and Haynes suggest that as long

*"The absence
of religion across the
curriculum in
public schools seriously
short-changes students."*

as our schools use conceptual nets that systematically exclude religion, we will keep missing important aspects of reality and will be under-educating our students.

This book does not serve as a comprehensive treatment of the law with respect to religion and schools. The authors have written other excellent books on that issue. Instead, this is a book that seeks to persuade teachers and others that schools can no longer ignore matters of religion. I do believe it succeeds.

My only complaint is that, for a book that makes a call for the study of all religions, it tends to use more examples from Christianity than from other religions. I found these examples particularly helpful, of course. The authors may have depended heavily on examples from Christianity knowing that most of their readers will have a North American background. Quibbles aside, this book is an excellent treatment of a complex issue, and the authors make a compelling case for including religion in all areas of study in public schools.