A forum for Christian school educators

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A Reformed Worldview For a Hurting World

Editorial

Bert Witvoet

Put On the Full Worldview of God!

The first time I became aware of worldviews, I was a student at Calvin College in the mid-1950s. Before that time, I thought the Heidelberg Catechism was all the ammunition I needed for fighting the good fight of faith. I had become a member of the Groen van Prinsterer Club (usually referred to as the Groen Club), which in essence was a worldview club sponsored by philosophy professor H. Evan Runner. The only part I regret about belonging to that club is that we became separatist in our thinking. It didn't help either that Runner was a bit of an outcast in Calvin's philosophy department. In fact, efforts were made at that time to oust him, a plan that was thwarted by Canadian members of Calvin's Board of Trustees.

Most members of the Groen Club were recent emigrants from Holland to Canada, and our thinking was more European than North American. Being able to read Dutch, we were in touch with the thinking of such Dutch writers and statesmen as Groen van Prinsterer and Abraham Kuyper. Some of us even pretended to understand Christian philosophers Herman Dooyeweerd and D. H. Vollenhoven, having digested a few lectures on these giants by Dr. Runner. And, of course, we had to own the three-volume *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* by Dooyeweerd. I still have these volumes on my bookshelves, but they remain largely unread. I, for one, never became interested enough in pure philosophy to make a deep study of these books.

Body and soul

But what I treasure about my membership in this largely ethnically-determined club and my taking courses with Dr. Runner is that I ended up with invaluable tools I could use to discern the society and culture that surrounded me. In those days, we called it the Reformational perspective. I now call it a Reformed worldview.

The most useful idea I gained from Runner's presentation was that the Greeks introduced dualistic thinking into Western culture. The vivid image of a soul being kept like a bird in a cage (the body), which would be released upon death, had apparently influenced medieval theologians like Thomas Acquinas, and people like him had begun to interpret the Scripture as if it, too, preached a separation of soul and body. The body was evil and to be distrusted, and the soul was our only hope for salvation. The joke that having sex standing up was bad because it could lead to dancing crudely illustrated this distrust of the body in Christian circles.

Against this form of dualism, Reformed thinkers spoke of the need for a holistic worldview that sought to sanctify soul *and* body and recognized the all-encompassing redemption of Christ. "Life is religion" was our battle cry when we attacked the notion that the world can be divided into the secular and the sacred. "Christ lays claim to every inch of this world." We spoke of the antithesis, a struggle between the domain of darkness and the kingdom of light, and of the fact that this struggle ran right through the believer's heart and even through churches.

Tools for discernment

Ah, yes, we were a bit aggressive, and it took the Holy Spirit a few years to straighten us out on that, reminding us that the claims of Christ go through the cross. It's amazing how long you can keep the Holy Spirit at bay when you think too much of yourself. But he allowed us to keep the tools that we were given in those heady days. Today, a few decades and battle scars later, I would plead with all educators to sharpen their worldview tools and take some time to read a book like *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View* by Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton, both students of students of H. Evan Runner.

Not that we should develop a worldview for its own sake. We *need* a worldview to be fruitful as Christ's agents in this world. If the apostle had known about worldviews, he would have included it in the description of the armor of God in Ephesians 6:10-18, I believe. But worldviews were not articulated much in Paul's time, and certainly not at a time when Paul was spreading the Gospel and starting up churches.

Let me quote a few sentences from Nicholas Wolterstorff's introduction to *The Transforming Vision* to demonstrate the need for a biblical worldview.

"A people's worldview is their way of thinking about life and the world. Why does the Christian worldview remain so disembodied in spite of the fact that so many in our society count themselves as Christians? The answer that Walsh and Middleton develop is that Christians in general fail to perceive the radical comprehensiveness of the biblical worldview. They assume that its formative impact does not reach beyond some 'religious' corner of life. 'Lo, here but not there' is how they think. They fail to perceive the longing of God for the expression of the faith in the polis. Accordingly, some other, competing worldview and some other, competing faith shape their public lives. Christians, in short, are dualists."

Communal challenge

This observation is at one and the same time an indictment

and a challenge. And I would place that challenge before all Christian school teachers. All of us have to become a bit philosophical. We don't all need to study Plato, Hegel and Kant, but we do need to find out about other worldviews. We need to know what is meant, for example, by materialism, moralism, modernism and post-modernism. A Christian worldview does not stand in splendid isolation to other worldviews. Quite often we find out what is good by studying what is not good and helpful.

A Christian worldview is developed in community. You need a community of scholars to lead the way and a community of practitioners to work out the Christian worldview. Catholic scholars have done it for their community. Reformed scholars have done it for ours. As such, we don't need to start from scratch.

No muddled thinking

Sometimes there is resistance from educators in our Christian schools toward developing a distinctly Reformed worldview. They are concerned about disenfranchising other fine Christians who teach in our schools or who send their children to them. Let it be a biblical worldview, they say. And I say Amen to that, except it would be a little presumptuous to call your own worldview biblical as opposed to other "non-biblical" worldviews. Why not title yours "Reformed" and let others test it against the Scriptures?

Besides, it's a mistake to translate a desire to work together with other Christians into a worldview that incorporates all the traditions they represent. Worldviews don't lend themselves to blended thinking. All you get then is muddled thinking. Worldviews have to be consistent internally. They have to have integrity, and that's possible only when you work from a family of assumptions that belong together. This is the problem with Christian schools which want to reach out to other Christians, but who end up minimizing their Reformed principles, not because these principles have been found wanting, but because people are afraid to offend Christians from other traditions.

Having Christian day schools independent of church and state is not unrelated to being Reformed. The very notion of starting them a hundred years ago, at a time when the culture had not degenerated to the point it has today, is a Reformed notion — the very proof that our schools are meant to transform the mind of the students and the culture of the day, however morally decent. That's being Reformed. That is working with the principles some of our writers in this issue have placed before you.

Necessary glasses

But, above all, worldviews have to be more than theories. In fact, Walsh and Middleton say that "worldviews are best understood as we see them incarnated, fleshed out in actual ways of life. They are not systems of thought, like theologies or philosophies. Rather, wordviews are perceptual frameworks. They are ways of seeing. If we want to understand what people see, or how well they see, we need to watch how they walk. If they bump into certain objects or stumble over them, then we can assume that they are blind to them. Conversely, their eyes may not only see but dwell on certain other objects" (*The Transforming Vision*, p. 17)

The thing to keep in mind about worldviews is that they do not save you, and they are never perfectly in line with God's revelation. A Reformed worldview pair of glasses also permits you to see only darkly. But if we don't trash churches and Christian schools because they are imperfect, neither should we trash a Reformed worldview. You've got to have a way of seeing the world, right? Why not make an *attempt*, at least, to see it right?

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To Be or Not to Be REFORMED

—No Cliché Intended

by James Vreugdenhil

James Vreugdenhil is elementary school curriculum coordinator for the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools in Ancaster, Ontario.

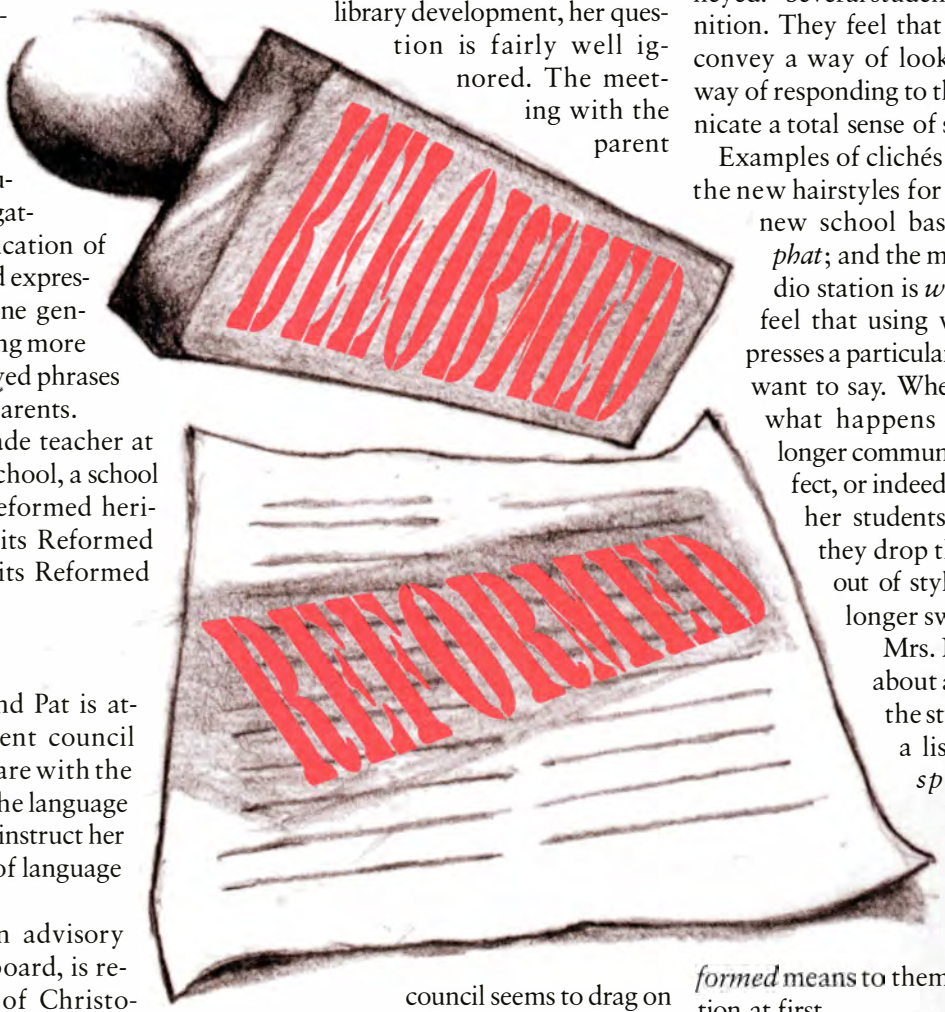
Schools operate best on a well-defined basis and vision, and within a carefully articulated framework that characterizes the educational goals and practices of the school. Schools can lose the ability to convey their vision in words that mean something to both the supporting community and to families investigating the school for the education of their children. Concepts and expressions that mean a lot to one generation may become nothing more than worn-out and hackneyed phrases to the next generation of parents.

Pat Nexus is a tenth-grade teacher at ChristoCentric Christian School, a school that prides itself on its Reformed heritage, its Reformed basis, its Reformed world and life view, and its Reformed vision.

More heat than light

It's Tuesday evening, and Pat is attending the school's parent council meeting where she will share with the members some aspects of the language arts curriculum she uses to instruct her students in the intricacies of language usage.

The parent council, an advisory committee to the school board, is reviewing various aspects of ChristoCentric's language arts program this year so they can advise the school board on the direction and development of the library. Secretly, Pat is hoping that the meeting will not drag on too long because she still has some more lesson planning to do for tomorrow's language class on clichés.



At first, the interaction goes well. But then things get bogged down as the discussion increasingly centers on some library books that are too secular and on the need to have more books in the library that reflect the Reformed perspective. When Pat asks the parents to list what *being Reformed* means in the context of language arts and library development, her question is fairly well ignored. The meeting with the parent council seems to drag on forever as parents heatedly debate the issues.

By the time Pat is excused from the encounter, she really wonders whether anybody knew what being Reformed had to do with daily school life at ChristoCentric.

No longer sweet

The next day Mrs. Nexus starts off her class by asking her students what clichés are. After several students volunteer a definition, one student reads from the dictionary. "Cliché: n. a trite or overused expression or idea. v. to stereotype; being stale or common place through overuse; hackneyed." Several students object to the definition. They feel that clichés are used to convey a way of looking at things, or a way of responding to things, or to communicate a total sense of something.

Examples of clichés are soon provided: the new hairstyles for guys are *sweet*; the new school basketball jerseys are *phat*; and the music on the local radio station is *wicked*. The students feel that using words this way expresses a particular flavor of what they want to say. When Mrs. Nexus asks what happens when a cliché no longer communicates the desired effect, or indeed becomes over-used, her students respond that then they drop the word — then it's out of style, it's passé, it's no longer sweet.

Mrs. Nexus then inquires about adult clichés. Again, the students respond with a list — headed by *respectable* and *Reformed*, and ending with *neat*. When Mrs. Nexus asks her students what the word *Reformed* means to them, there is little reaction at first.

One finally replies, "It means, well, it just means something to adults having to do with religion."

Then another chimes in, "It's just a word that has lost its meaning."

A third student responds with, "It's a

word, ummm..., actually a cliché that my parents use in talking about ChristoCentric. They get all riled up about whether our school really is Reformed, but I don't see how it makes any difference to me or anybody else here."

Then one of the students says, "My parents have argued over the word Reformed but nobody seems to explain or define it in any sensible way. Is that what makes it a cliché?"

A convenient term

How well Pat understands the responses of her students. She often has similar thoughts about the concept of being Reformed. As her students go to work on selecting several clichés from the assigned reading and then recording their understanding of the author's intent, she frowns to herself as her thoughts return to last evening's parent council meeting. She reflects on her own understanding of the term. Does her teaching convey a Reformed view of the world and the meaning of life?

Reformed, she thinks. It is a convenient word to use to describe a way of looking at the world. Her analytical mind goes into action. The word *Reformed* expresses her convictions about: the sovereignty of God, the totality of Christ's redemptive restoration of all creation, the way Psalm 19 explains the meaning of the creation, the Scriptures, knowledge, culture and community, one's task in this world, and yes, education, and so much more.

As she walks around the room, listening to the students' discussions about the use of clichés in the assigned passage, she keeps wondering about the situation at ChristoCentric. If the full implication of the word Reformed is understood by both speaker and listener, she debates with herself, then it can convey a rich and meaningful way of describing a set of complex concepts. However, she argues inwardly, if the word is no more than a stale, trite, hackneyed word that signifies nothing, then the sound and the fury over being Reformed at ChristoCentric is not worth the time it takes to say the word.

The word *Reformed* expresses her convictions about:

- the sovereignty of God,
- the totality of Christ's redemp tive restoration of all creation,
- the way Psalm 19 explained the meaning of the creation,
- the Scriptures,
- knowledge,
- culture and community,
- one's task in this world,
- and yes, education,
- and so much more.

Pat recalls the comments by some of her students about clichés being able to convey meaning and nuances of language to describe a response to events, situations and complex concepts. But no, she retorts to herself, the students are not right in that definition of cliché. A word such as Reformed can signify a way of interpreting the world and the meaning of life. And as long as both parties in the dialogue are aware of that, then meaningful communication can occur through the use of phrases such as a Reformed perspective, Reformed heritage, and Reformed basis. However, she concludes, if the word no longer connotes the full and rich meaning to both speaker and listener, then the word is becoming nothing more than a cliché — a stereotypical and stale expression.

Two options

Pat wonders if that is what is happening at ChristoCentric. The board, the parent council, and the school's literature often use the word Reformed. If the word is becoming nothing more than a cliché, then she can see two options. The community can either drop the word and use language that more clearly and meaningfully describes the basis and purpose of Christian education at ChristoCentric, or the board can initiate a long-term community growth and development plan to reawaken in the community the concepts of the Reformed worldview which constitutes the framework for the practice of education at ChristoCentric school. Yes, she thinks to herself, that's what she should propose to the parent council at its next meeting.

With a sudden start Pat realizes she has almost forgotten about her students and the assignment they are working on. She needs to re-engage them in a discussion of the meaning of the word cliché, the use of clichés as part of our every-day language, and the need for clear communication to enhance the meaningful interaction that helps build community.

Beware of Reformed Christian Education

It May Be Dangerous!

by Jack Fennema

Jack Fennema is a professor of education at Covenant College, Lookout Mountain, Georgia.

"Christian schools are meant to be bootcamps for equipping the children of the King to engage the enemy, rather than cities of refuge to which to flee for safety from a sinful world."

(Nicholas Wolterstorff — circa 1970)

Christian education that is biblically "Reformed" is a wonderful thing. It provides, perhaps, the most precise rationale for the enterprise. Rather than *reacting* to the dangers of violence, drugs, or secular humanism found in other systems, Reformed Christian education is a *proactive* approach to equipping children and young people for their life callings. Schools of this stripe are comfortable with the adage that "the best defense is a good offense."

But therein lies the rub. It would be much safer to retreat to schools designed to be "cities of refuge" from the ills of the world than actively to engage the enemy through search-and-destroy missions. Many Christian schools today are designed to be "safe houses"; Reformed Christian schools are not. They are designed to follow four Reformed tenets for education: 1) actively engage culture; 2) take a *high* view of general revelation; 3) rightly handle the antithesis; and 4) apply sphere sovereignty to schools.

On the warpath

Reformed Christian schools actively engage culture because the central mission of Christ's earthly ministry was the (re)establishment of God's kingdom on earth (Matthew 4:23-24; 6:10, 33). Christ did this as both salt and light, in a very active manner, "destroying the devil's work"(1 John 3:8). Through his healing ministry, the casting out of demons, and, ultimately, his death and resurrection, Christ was "salt" that preserved and redeemed the "good" creation. Through his teaching and preaching of the truth, as well as his perfect life, Christ was "light" that uncovered the false claims of the kingdom of darkness. Christ in his Great Commission instructed his body, the church, to disciple people and to teach "them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (Matthew 31:18-20).

These are also the marching orders for the teachers of God's children. Their students are to be equipped to "imitate Christ" (Romans 8:29; 1 Corinthians 15:49; 2 Corinthians 3:18) by taking "captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Indeed, Christian education of this type reflects a war-footing, a preparation for reclaiming territory that rightly belongs to King Jesus. It equips for spiritual warfare, since the kingdom of light and the dominion of darkness are in mortal conflict.

But warfare is dangerous. Soldiers are wounded and killed. That is a key reason some parents enroll their children in "safe" Christian schools. They don't want their children endangered by "warfare" within secular schools, nor do they want them engaged in cultural "war games" within the Christian school setting. In contrast with "safe" schools, Reformed Christian schools do not avoid curriculum materials and activities that have the taint of sin on them. Rather, just as simulated battles prepare soldiers for warfare in the real world, students in Reformed Christian schools wrestle with real-life issues in school as part of their preparation for being disciples of Christ.

Immunization approach

Sometimes this means reading a book that contains offensive language or watching a film that includes violent scenes. It may mean deliberately selecting a secular textbook over a Christian one in order to deal with the spirits of the age in a more authentic manner. This, essentially, reflects the immunization approach to education over that of avoidance.

Vaccinations actually inject a small amount of the disease into one's system so that antibodies can be formed to fight off a more pronounced form of the disease. Avoidance of all controversial issues, on the other hand, can set one up for defeat when later confronted with the fallen culture of a secular university, the military, or the workplace. The *Reformed* approach to Christian education rejects cultural avoidance; rather, it seeks cultural transformation.

But herein lies a danger: What if students are not spiritually equipped to handle an active engagement with culture? And, some are not. Do we risk casualties right within our own Christian schools? To deal honestly with this issue, the reality of spiritual warfare must first be acknowledged and then addressed by the school. In Ephesians 6, Paul describes the armor of God that one must put on in order to engage the enemy effectively.

Teachers need to make certain that their students are properly equipped before placing them in harm's way. They must, in a corresponding manner, make certain that students are not "led into temptation" through exposure to materials or experiences for which they are not yet spiritually ready. Students who do not yet have the mind of Christ are unable to view a film or read a novel in the same redemptive manner as those who have surrendered to Christ's lordship. Not to be concerned about the spiritual maturity of students before teaching certain lessons may, in fact, do more damage than good.

The book of creation

A second tenet for Reformed Christian schools is that they take a *high* view of general revelation. In fact, this may reflect the greatest contrast between Christian schools that are Reformed and those that are not. Many Christians believe that all of creation — nature, society, and culture — is Satan's domain and that it will ultimately be totally destroyed. So, why fool with it! As far as God's revelation goes, they believe the Bible is all that is needed. Consequently, the Bible is sometimes used as a textbook in ways for which it was not intended. Reformed Christians, on the other hand, sing and believe: "This is my Father's world." They read Psalm 19 and Romans 1 and conclude that God has spoken and revealed himself through the created order as well as through the Bible.

But here, too, there are dangers as students search for truth that has been posited by God in creation. Three areas of concern over a high view of general revelation emerge: a) determining what is true; b) dealing with common grace insights; and c) rightly handling the antithesis.

Determine what is true

God speaks with one voice, but he speaks through different modes. If a perceived conflict appears between general and special revelation on a particular issue (e.g., the age of the earth), then either one's general revelation research data or his interpretation of them (or both) are flawed, or one's exegesis of the Bible is skewed. Historically, based on John Calvin's metaphor of using the Bible as eyeglasses through which to view and interpret the world, the answer appears to be simple. Special revelation, because it is more explicitly clear, always should be used to interpret general revelation.

But, unhappily, good Christian folk differ on the interpretation of Scripture (e.g., baptism). In addition, simply by accepting creation as an avenue through which God communicates his truth, it is an easy next step to draw conclusions from creation that may only be Satan's lies in disguise. After all, he is the arch-deceiver.

Another danger of seeking truth through general revelation is taking conclusions drawn from culture and using them to interpret Scripture, the basis of the great modernist controversy early in the last century. General revelation, in this case, is used to contextualize special revelation, an unacceptable hermeneutical practice. How can teachers guard against these dangers? Not by seeking God's truth *solely* through the Bible. That would be a cop-out.

There are better alternatives. An awareness of the issue is a good starting point. Submitting to the Bible as the authoritative Word of God and the bottom-line for all faith and learning is also foundational. Biblical literacy, in the original languages if possible, is another protective device. Being aware of personal biases while reading either mode of revelation, and praying for the illumination of the Holy Spirit are other recommended helps.

Common grace insights

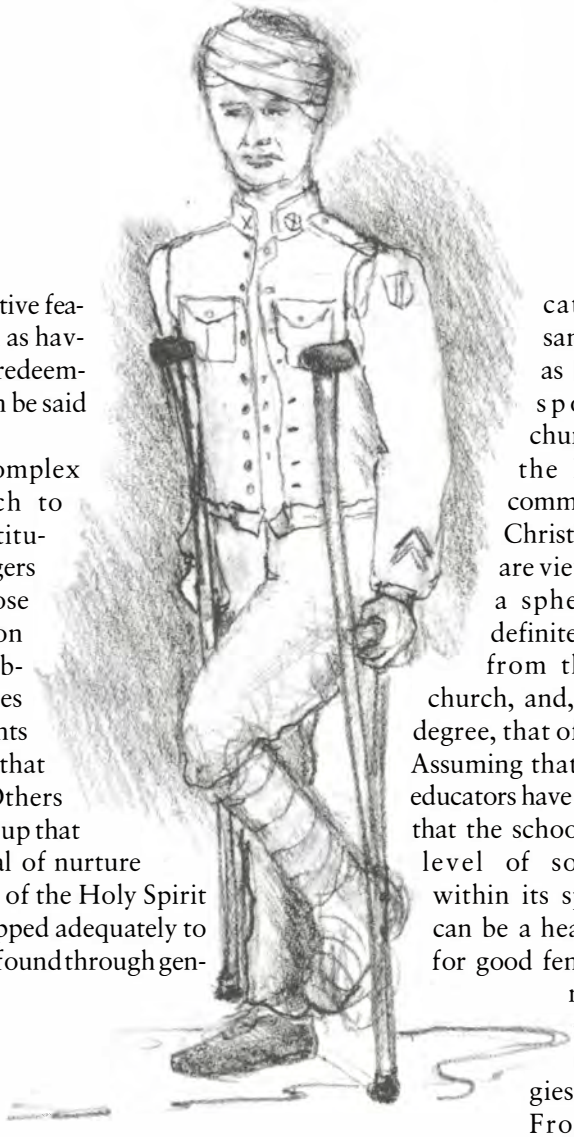
Some Christians judge the validity of a person's ideas on whether or not the person is a believer in Christ. That certainly is a "safe" approach taken by certain Christian schools. In fact, some Christian textbooks give disproportionate credence to the contributions of Christians throughout the ages. Heart-condition is the litmus test for believability. Reformed educators, however, believe that non-Christians can have what theologians call "common grace" insights. Thus, it is valid to read what unbelievers have written and to study their contributions.

The danger, however, in studying the works of unbelievers is one of discernment. Are the students, in fact, equipped both in heart and mind to find the nugget of truth in a person's work, while discarding the extra baggage that the individual may have added in his or her blindness? Again, the equipment necessary to do this includes a thorough understanding of Scripture so that its light can shine brightly and clearly. It also requires a biblical worldview that can be used by students as a truth-determining template. Without these tools, there will be no way a student will be able to discern the difference between fool's gold and the real thing, and teachers may, in effect, be teaching the opposite of what they intend.

Line of division

A third distinctive is that Reformed Christian schools teach the right handling of the antithesis. The term "antithesis" within Reformed circles alludes to the battle between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. Many Christians believe, at least in practice, that the line or boundary between light and darkness runs *around* people and institutions. Thus, there are the redeemed people and institutions on the one side, and the unredeemed on the other. It's all or nothing. This creates a good-guy, bad-guy approach to life and learning. For instance, President George Washington could be viewed as a good guy, and President Bill Clinton could be viewed as a bad guy. Christian schools could be seen as good institutions, and public schools could be seen as bad institutions. That is a very "safe" position to take, for everything is cut-and-dried. Life viewed in this manner has no ambiguities.

The Reformed position, on the other hand, states that the antithesis runs *through* people and institutions. Even Christians struggle between a redeemed heart that seeks to please God and the "old man that is in them" that seeks to disobey God. Both George Washington and Bill Clinton are



viewed as having redemptive features, and both are seen as having features that needed redeeming as well. The same can be said about institutions.

Taking this more complex educational approach to events, people, or institutions carries with it dangers that are similar to those cited above for common grace insights. It takes biblical discernment — eyes that can see. Some students have hearts and minds that are right before God. Others don't. It is this latter group that will require a great deal of nurture and the transformation of the Holy Spirit before they will be equipped adequately to determine and use truth found through general revelation.

Different tasks

Finally, Reformed Christian schools acknowledge the sovereignty of spheres. "Sphere sovereignty" is an insight that has emerged more from general revelation than special. It is also identified primarily with and embraced by the Dutch stream of Reformed thinking. Basically, it means that various spheres or realms of social and cultural activity have their own peculiar creation norms or reasons for existence, as well as their own authority. These spheres include the family, church, school, government. For purposes of this discussion, only the spheres of church and school will be dealt with.

Many Christian schools are ministries of a church. This blurs the role, responsibilities and boundaries of authority within both the church and the school. The result is that the primary mission of some Christian schools is evangelism rather than education, the same mission as that of the sponsoring church. Within the Reformed community, most Christian schools are viewed within a sphere that is definitely separate from that of the church, and, to a lesser degree, that of the home. Assuming that Reformed educators have it right, and that the school has some level of sovereignty within its sphere, this can be a healthy thing, for good fences usually make good neighbors (my apologies to Robert Frost). Stated from a more negative perspective, when creation structures are violated, problems arise.

But with the acceptance of sphere sovereignty, a problem and a consequent danger emerge. Taken to its extreme, sphere sovereignty cites the church, not the school, as the place within which faith is nurtured. Consequently, devotions, chapel services, biblical studies and encouragement toward commitment to Christ are viewed as activities that don't rightly belong in an academic institution. They are thought to be more within the spheres of the church or the home. Given a perfect world, this might make some sense, but the needs of students in a fallen world cry out for *all* Christian agencies and leaders to be vitally concerned for the spiritual equipping of God's children.

Specifically, every teacher should have some insight into the spiritual development of his or her students. Every student needs to be made aware of the claims of Christ on his or her life and receive continual encouragement to respond to those claims. Christian schools need to graduate students who are biblically literate, who know how to apply a biblical worldview, and who can discern the spirits of the times. Students need to understand and accept the reality of spiritual warfare, and they need to be equipped with the armor of God. Only then can teachers feel free to educate in a full-orbed manner and risk the dangers of engaging culture for Christ.

Salt and light

In summary, doing Christian education in a Reformed manner is a thoughtful and biblical approach to the formal instruction of God's children. It provides, perhaps, the most academically acceptable apologetic for Christ-centered education. It can more than hold its own against alternative approaches. Reformed Christian education pro-actively engages culture for Christ, the King over all of culture. As modern-day salt and light, it promotes active engagement of the enemy, and it seeks to uncover God's truth, wherever it may be found.

But with this aggressive approach come certain dangers. Each of the dangers cited above relates to spiritual maturity, to spiritual readiness. Even in school, where the warfare is primarily simulated, the armor must be worn — the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Praying in the Spirit will provide the protective cover. Doing Reformed education this way, we will nurture our students toward spiritual vitality and readiness as our schools become "bootcamps" within the kingdom of our Lord.


John Verbruggen

The Story of Our Journal:
a professional magazine called CEJ

by Bert Witvoet

At the most recent board meeting of the Christian Educators Journal Association, the comment was made that many teachers who read us do not know the purpose and history of the *Christian Educators Journal*. Some even think of it as a publication of Christian Schools International. I was asked to have someone write an article that would explain why our magazine exists and why it is so important that it continue. I decided, instead, to interview two former editors and a former board chairman and to read some early issues of the magazine in order to achieve the end sought by the board.

All in all, there have been six managing editors throughout the 41-year history of our journal. The first was John Verbruggen (1961-1963), professor of education at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich. The second editor, Donald Oppewal (1963-1977), was professor of education at Calvin College and has continuously served CEJ throughout its 40 years in one capacity or other — as managing editor, book reviewer, article writer, advertising manager and board member.

Lillian Grissen, a teacher and writer from Grand Rapids, Mich., came next (1977-1983), and Lorna Van Gilst followed (1983-1999). Lorna, a professor of education at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa, has been the longest serving managing editor. Her 16 years of service was interrupted for a year by the interim editorship of Pat Kornelis, also a professor of education at Dordt College. After Lorna, current managing editor Bert Witvoet, retired teacher and editor from St. Catharines, Ont., took on the responsibility of managing editorship in 1999.

To what needs did these editors and people like Henry Baron, who served as chairman of the board for 28 years and co-wrote the popular "Zoeklicht" column, respond when they devoted so much energy to the production of the Christian Educators Journal? This is what John Verbruggen, the only non-surviving editor, wrote in his first editorial in the first issue of CEJ:

Verbruggen: "If the journal is to survive, it must meet the needs of the Christian school teachers. The first of these needs is help in classroom situations.... Professional teachers are ever on the alert for new methods of teaching and for opportunities to share successful methods with others. The second need is knowledge of what is taking place in the field of education.... Another need is [obtaining] ... a clear and comprehensive statement of the educational philosophy that is basic to their existence.....What remains is the serious task of relating principles to specific practices and issues.... Finally, Christian teachers, to be effective, must keep acquainted with new publications.... For their help, a book review section will be included in future issues."

CEJ: *Don Oppewal, you were there when Christian Educators Journal was conceived and born in 1961. Can you tell us how CEJ got started?*

Oppewal: Yes, I was there at the beginning. I was a new member of the Education Department at Calvin College in 1960 and was asked, along with representatives of Christian Schools International (CSI), to test the idea of a professional magazine for Christian school teachers. CSI (then NUCS) had been toying with the idea for years, but had never gotten further than to devote a special page in their *Christian Home and School* magazine to professional topics. For two years, I was on the CSI Board of Trustees while we tried to get professional organizations of teachers to join our publishing venture.

Both CSI and Calvin College committed $500 annually to help fund the new periodical, which was to come out four times a year. When the Midwest Christian Teachers Association offered to come on board and collect the subscription amount from all its members, we were off and running.

CEJ: *And what did the founders have in mind?*

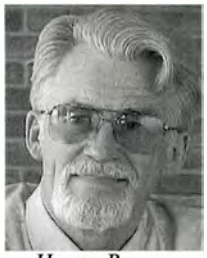
Oppewal: I believe the journal was begun because Christian educators had no forum for dialogue about their profession. At one time, I identified the distinctiveness of *CEJ* as "of the Christian educator, by the Christian educator, and for the Christian educator." While the early years had most of the articles written by college types, now the contributors arise much more from the ranks of elementary and secondary educators. In my judgment, *CEJ* was the first to take seriously the need for dialogue among educators, and it is only lately that CSI and ACSI have become competitors.

CEJ: *Henry Baron, how did you get involved in the work of CEJ?*

Baron: I started teaching in the Grand Rapids area after graduating from Calvin College in 1960. As a high school English teacher in the Reformed tradition, I was eager to subscribe to this new rag, called *Christian Educators Journal*. So I started reading *CEJ* when it was a very new and fairly small enterprise. Through all my years as a professional Christian educator, *CEJ* had its place on my reading shelf.

Shortly after I started teaching at Calvin College — it must've been early on in '69, I think — I was asked to join the CEJ Board as one of the two Calvin representatives. For some reason, I stayed on until I retired from full-time teaching in 1997. For much of that time, I had the privilege of serving as board chair. My long-term commitment to *CEJ* no doubt had much to do with my conviction that the Christian teacher is as much a trained professional as any non-Christian teacher, and as such should have a professional Christian journal among his


Don Oppewal


Henry Baron


Lorna Van Gilst

professional resources. Moreover, a Christian teacher thinks not only pedagogically about her task, but also philosophically, and thus about the necessary link between the two. And we all need help with that. Well, that's just one of the areas, but a foundational one, that made CEJ's birth so important and its continuing function and growth so vital.

CEJ: *Lorna Van Gilst, you have been managing editor the longest with 16 years of service, which includes one year leave of absence, what stands out in your mind about CEJ?*

Van Gilst: What stands out in my mind about my time with CEJ? That it was never out of my mind for 15 years. Wherever I went — to England to study a couple of summers, back to California for visits after I moved to Iowa, even to Venezuela sometimes — CEJ plans were always mulling around in my mind.

CEJ: *What role did you see CEJ play in giving leadership to Christian educators?*

As a columnist for two years and more particularly as editor, I grew so much more aware of the lordship of Christ in every aspect of Christian education. The CEJ board always pressed me to articulate a Kingdom vision in every issue, to provide a forum for views that would never be published in secular education journals. That vision helped me realize that my students were already active, gifted members serving in the Kingdom, not future members whom I had to "fill" with knowledge so they could compete in the world.

Many Christian educators believe in covenantal Christian education, in educating for service rather than for success, but CEJ has given those teachers and principals a public voice. CEJ encouraged some of us who were not speaking publicly to discuss our theory and practice of Christian education on the page. Until a regional editor asked me to submit an article, I had seldom read CEJ — I thought it was a journal primarily for principals and college educators. Once I began to edit CEJ, I gained a great respect for the voices of classroom teachers in Christian schools.

CEJ: *Henry, what are some of the great challenges that face teachers today?*

Baron: Today's challenges? Some remain primary and in constant need of attention: we need classroom teachers who are passionate about learning and teaching, who are first rate in knowledge and pedagogy, and who love the age group they're interacting with each day. But one would have that same ideal in education of any stripe, so it's not peculiar to Christian education.

I guess the challenge is to inspire teachers with the ever-present awareness that underneath those ideals is the foundational reason for their being where they are: in a Christian School classroom where their purpose is nothing less than pointing the way to a radical discipleship of Jesus Christ. That, of course, is not new either. But as the kingdoms of heaven and world move increasingly toward different orbits, the task becomes more urgent and all-pervasive. Its implications are terribly comprehensive: e.g., selection of teachers who will not only "point" but model and are passionate about their strategic calling; curricula that explore the implications in choice of friends, marriage, work, money, poverty, war, media, possessions; opportunity for group and individual action that carries out the vision.

CEJ: *How can the Christian Educators Journal help teachers in their task?*

Baron: CEJ is in a peculiar position to constantly remind the doers of Christian education of their reason for existence, maybe to raise the level of passionate excitement about that, and to encourage an on-going search for and evaluation of ways of doing that in a world in perpetual flux. My impression is that the radical nature of Christian education has inspirational power for its practitioners and its supporters but is too often displaced by more immediate, nitty-gritty concerns.

CEJ: *Don, Let me put the same question to you. What are some of the great challenges facing Christian educators today?*

Oppewal: While the challenges are many, one surely is that of keeping quality education through adequate funding. Christian educators, as leaders on the question of Christian schooling, should be seeking increasing financial aid for their schools from both church and government sources. This will assist those parents with either marginal income or marginal commitment to make the choice for Christian school.

Another challenge for educators is to keep the Christian school's Reformed identity and to distinguish its education from that of public education, which is often alluring to the unwary.

CEJ: *How can our journal assist educators?*

Oppewal: CEJ can continue, as it has in the past, to be the forum for not only presenting problems of pedagogy for the classroom but also for discussing foundational issues, those that spell long-range hope for the movement. Without a treatment of both in its pages, the practical and the foundational, CEJ will not be distinguishable from other periodicals. As a professional journal, and not merely a house organ for one ideology, it needs to be both inspirational and analytical about existing practices and ideologies.

Joy in the Journey in Cyberspace

by Mary Leigh Morbey

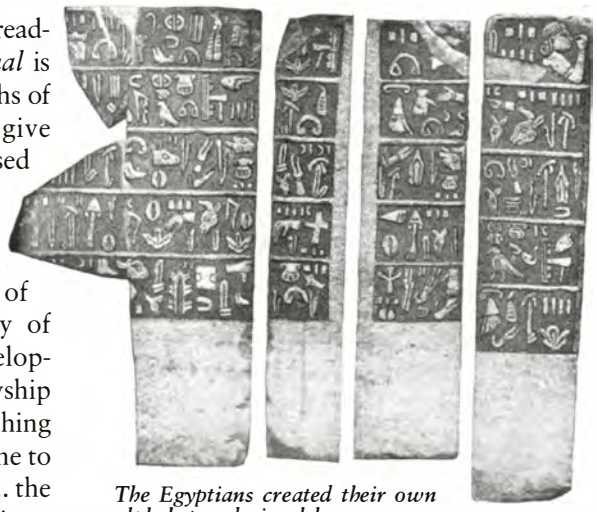
Mary Leigh Morbey is associate professor of culture and technology at York University in Toronto, Ont. The following article is adapted from an address she gave at the Ontario Christian School Teachers Association in October 2000. Dr. Morbey uses the term "Reformational" to indicate a worldview rather than a theology.

The question I want to place before readers of the *Christian Educators Journal* is this: How can we employ the strengths of the Reformational community to give Christian shaping in a computer-based culture?

Some 35 years ago, I was introduced to the Reformational understanding of life by Hans Rookmaaker, a professor of art history at the Free University of Amsterdam and a leader in the development of the Swiss-based L'Abri Fellowship Christian Community. The striking thing about this new world he introduced me to was its holistic understanding of life ... the discovery of meaning, purpose and direction with God as my Father, Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord, and the Holy Spirit as my guide. This understanding of reality is valid for past worlds and cultures that were mainly oral and visual, for ones in which the printing press led to their shaping through printed text, and for the world today, which is driven by computer-based information technology.

For 35 years, I have participated in the life of Reformed communities led by what we have come to call the Reformational vision or Reformational worldview — very different from the southern United States culture in which I was raised. This understanding of reality is quite remarkable! It helps us understand why we are here and what our purpose and direction is in living each day. We have been led to build church communities, school communities ranging from kindergartens to graduate schools, organizations that care for the earth, its people, politics, economics and so forth. These understandings of reality that we inherit as Reformed believers enable us to meaningfully shape our historical moment.

The theological and philosophical footings of the Reformational community — what we might call its worldview — have been guided by, among others, Dutch thinker and leader Abraham Kuyper, who taught us what we have heard repeated many times, that God lays claim to every inch and millimeter of life, to every computer chip. Our footings challenge us to continually reform that in which we find ourselves and to do so through relationships and community building. Our educational institutions through deep commitment, rigor and love teach us how to care well for God's world.



The Egyptians created their own alphabet and visual language....

Technologies and education

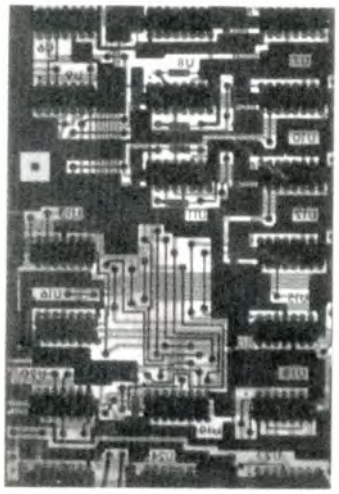
And this world we live in is ever more a computer-based one. The notion of living with technology is not new. We have lived with different kinds of technologies since the beginning of human life. Early civilizations drew on the walls of caves. The Egyptians created their own alphabet and visual language which they painted or sculpted on "things" important to their culture. The Early Christian church visually rendered jeweled wall mosaics to communicate her beliefs and theology. The printing press of the 15th century gave us the printed word. The twentieth century gave us the computer chip. Humans have always lived with some kinds of technology that became a part of their everyday experience. The important question is: How do we view and employ a particular technology to render and enhance what we believe to be important in life?

In recent years the academic computer science community has told us what it believes to be important. In the 1980s and into the early 1990s, much thought was given to developments in artificial intelligence and debates about virtual bodies and realities; both these discussions became somewhat irrelevant in the late 1990s. More interesting to current theory are discussions about genetic technologies and artificial life. [1] The commercial world of computing focuses on different kinds of concerns: speed, size, wireless, the dot-com explosion and bottom line profits propelling NASDAQ investment.

In contrast to the emphases of commercial computing, an international group of computer scientists, computer theorists, software and hardware manufacturers and lawyers forming an organization entitled Computers, Freedom and Privacy critically watches an expanding World Wide Web that is becoming more exclusive as web patents and online costs continue to exclude those who cannot pay as they go. Currently, 93 percent of the world's population does not have access to the Web. The group's objective is to work towards an open, accessible and "democratized" Web for all world communities.

Computer as tool

These realities have led those of us working in educational communities to ask:



The world we live in is ever more a computer-based one.

When we talk about computer-based technology in relation to education, what is it we are talking about, and what are we doing with this technology? A vast amount of educational discussion and argumentation about computer technology views "computers in education" as simply instructional tools, and this is, perhaps, the dominant viewpoint within the broader North American educational community. This understanding works on the premise that technology is "applied science." Hence, computers are "just machines." The metaphors of this way of speaking convey the autonomy of moral neutrality, an independence of value-free instruments.[2] This understanding assumes that computers can be used for good or evil, and these tools, powerful as they may be, are not blamed for what is done with them.

The viewpoint of the computer as a tool is a reductionistic and limited view of the computer. The computer is a tool. However, when we reflect on the amount of attention paid to the coming of the year 2000 with much worry about whether computer systems, many of them life-sustaining, would re-numerate to the correct number of zeroes, then we understand that computer technology is a dominant shaper of our global existence, something more than a tool.

Technology as system

In contrast to the viewpoint that the computer is a mere tool, let us briefly examine two other considerations as we continue to ponder the question: What do I understand computer technology to be?

Ursula Franklin, emeritus professor at the University of Toronto and a professing Christian believer, points out in her 1990 CBC Massey Lecture "The Real World of Technology" that technology is not the sum of the artifacts, of the wheels and gears, of the rails and electronic transmitters. Technology is a *system.* It entails far more than its individual material components. Technology involves organization, procedures, symbols, new words, equations, and, most of all, a mindset.[3]

Franklin observes that in today's world we have two kinds of technology practice: holistic and prescriptive. Holistic technology is work-related, oriented to achieving specific tasks and making better practices easier. In sharp contrast, prescriptive technologies aim to control the process of work itself — the dominant practice in advanced industrial society.

An alternative to this continued domination by prescriptive technology practices is to build a "redemptive technology." The central principles of redemptive technol-

ogy are holism and reciprocity — reciprocity is fundamental in the dialogue between the developer and the user and is, therefore, the essence of democracy as well as justice, fairness and equality. Holism is key to recognizing limits and building community, including marginalized people and protecting nature. [4]

New worldview needed

A second consideration comes from Simon Penny, professor of art and computing at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburg. In the mid-1990s, Penny astutely delineated the situation, both conceptual and strikingly real, in which we find ourselves at the beginning of the 2lst century: "Systems of communication and structures of power have changed, yet the worldviews and critical systems that operate in many of our institutions are pre-electronic, often pre-industrial." [5]

A development of worldviews and critical systems — something which Reformational thinkers and communities have been superb at doing over the past hundred years — for an emerging computer-based information society, and in particular its educational vision, practice and school community building, can provide "structure and direction" [6] for the inter-relationship of computer-based technology and Reformational Christian education. Hence, we need new worldviews and critical systems for understanding, direction and practice towards "redemptive" computer technology.

As we work to articulate an informed shaping of computer technology and education interconnected to our beliefs and commitments as Reformational people in the 21st century, we share similar struggles economically with the entire educational community. Whereas Microsoft and Apple Computer can allot millions of dollars to research and development and educational experiments such as the "Apple Classroom of Tomorrow" project, school boards, college and university monetary planners are tightly strapped in their possibilities to purchase and supply the hardware, software, training expertise and support needed for state-of-the-art computer technology in education.

The entire educational community faces the struggle to continue to have a well-financed, holistic approach to education — giving a strong place to the humanities and the arts. Idea development depends on imagination and creativity. We need careful thought and savvy in our discussions of how to continue to build curricula that engage the whole person and do not fall prey to corporate and federal funds directed solely towards computer technology and to the development of skilled workers in an emerging information society. Let us not forget that education remains concerned with that which has been its foci for millennia: information leading to knowledge leading to wisdom.

Holistic practice

Back to the question: How can we use the historical understandings and strengths of the Reformational community to give Christian shaping in a computer-based culture?

If you believe what I am suggesting, that computers are more than tools and embody mindsets and worldviews, let me leave you with several suggestions to reflect upon and possibly enact in your educational context.

First, with a clear understanding and articulation of the Christian vision and direction of your educational context, critically ponder and decide what "the computer" is in your setting. I believe it is most important for us to clarify how we each view the computer. This also needs to take place in staff room discussions so that there is understanding as to how the school and staff view the computer and its use in the school.

If there is interest in a richer and more meaningful use of the computer, a reading of and subsequent staff room discussion of Ursula Franklin's 1990 Massey Lecture "The Real World of Technology," asking what particular ideas "might concretely look like" in your school, could reap fruitful results. Exploring how a school staff could employ computers beyond regular prescriptive uses, such as completing an assignment on the computer, could bring about more holistic practice. For example, asking and addressing questions of fair and equitable computer access in one's classroom and school community can lead to more holistic practice.

Questions about fair computer access include: Which students are the main users of school computers, and how can those who are not regular users be facilitated towards regular engagement? Who assists those who have trouble using computers or are intimidated by computing? And how might World Wide Web access in school be equalized to give more availability to those students who do not have a home computer with a high speed connection?

Using the Web

A second consideration: How might we employ the computer to bring about new kinds of learning? To get at this question, I will refer to recent research about learning and the World Wide Web. My York University colleague Ronald Owston published an article in the March 1997 *Educational Researcher* entitled "The World Wide Web: A Technology to Enhance Teaching and Learning?" [7] It is a "benchmark" article, well accessible for staff room discussion with research ideas illuminated by concrete practice; it is not one of those esoteric, obscure, barely comprehensible articles that we university academics spend much of our time writing!

In the article, Owston differentiates between the Web being used as an educational tool and the effective use of the medium in a teaching and learning situation to promote improved learning.

From this perspective, the Web appears to offer at least three distinct advantages that can be capitalized upon by the teacher to promote improved learning. First, the Web appeals to students as a learning mode — it is an integral part of their world where they play and learn. Second, the Web provides flexible learning — Web-based study projects and on-line activities can be accessed at the student's convenience. Three, the Web enables new kinds of learning — in the hands of capable teachers, the web can play a prominent role in fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, written communication and the ability to work collaboratively. For example, in the development of critical thinking and collabo-

ration, teachers can encourage students working in pairs to explore the Web with the goals of having them weigh evidence, compare different viewpoints on issues, analyze and synthesize diverse sources of information and articulate what a Christian understanding might be. A staff meeting devoted to discussing the Owston article and to asking how these ideas might be concretely worked out, is well worth the time spent, and again moves towards a "redemptive technology."

Global community

Let me briefly mention a third area of growing importance. Employing the Internet and World Wide Web, we have an opportunity to build with our students, and Christian students and teachers worldwide, global Christian schooling communities. The idea of sharing curriculum, on-line classes and possible face-to-face learning situations with a class at the True Vine Christian School in St. Petersburg, Russia, is not farfetched — some of you are probably doing this kind of thing already.

We are only just beginning to explore holistic and meaningful uses of the computer for curriculum development, collaboration with colleagues, national and global Internet learning environments, along with the contemplation of new pedagogical paradigms of how to concretely do these things in light of our Christian school visions.

With these thoughts in mind and imagination, I ask you to continue to ponder and to concretely work out how you can employ with joy the strengths of the Reformational inheritance to give Christian shaping in a computer-based culture for the development of human beings, the discovery of meaning, and the understanding of meaning in community in your particular educational context.

We are on an exciting journey as we figure out how, as Christian educators, to engage a world ever more daily directed by computer technology. We have the challenge and opportunity to give shape, emanating from our beliefs, commitments and relationships, to communities which meaningfully embody computer technology and communicate who we are, and, in doing so, to give glory to our God.

References:

1) Maria Fernandez, "Post-colonial Media Theory," *Art Journal 58* (3) (Fall 1999), 58-73.

2) See William A. Stahl's discussion of "Talking about Technology" in *God and the Chip: Religion and the Culture of Technology,* Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1999, 14-19.

3) Ursula Franklin, *The Real World of Technology* (CBC Massey Lecture Series), Concord, Ontario: Anansi Press, 1990, 12.

4) For a fuller analysis see Franklin, 1990 and Stahl 1999, 142-146.

5) Simon Penny, Introduction, *Critical Issues in Electronic Media,* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995, 2.

6) Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview,* Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1985.

7) Ronald D. Owston, The World Wide Web: A Technology to Enhance Teaching and Learning? *Educational Researcher 26* (2) (March 1997), 27-33.

Panel Dot Edu

The (in)visible adjective "Reformed"


Clarence Joldersma

Clarence Joldersma (cjolders@calvin.edu), assistant professor of education at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan, asked the Dot Edu panel the following question: Perhaps peculiar to CSI schools is the question of confessional identity. Do we want the schools we teach in to be known as (1) Reformed Christian schools, or (2) Christian schools with a distinctly Reformed outlook, or (3) should we drop the adjective "Reformed" in all our promotional material, staff discussions, staff hiring and what not, so that we can be known as Christian schools?

The panel consists of:

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

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

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

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

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

November 15, 2001


Johanna Campbell

Clarence, I think we should drop the adjective 'Reformed' in all our promotional material, so that we can be known simply as Christian schools. I remember that when I first started teaching, my first two schools were called Calvin Christian School. In British Columbia, most schools have dropped "Reformed" names and are now just named after the community or city in which they are called to shine as lights. If our schools are so good, and I believe they are, then we should open them to as many children as we can, giving priority to the children of believing parents. That is being a salt and light in this world.

More and more I see that our fortress mentality was too selfish. It was Groen Van Pinsterer who said: "*In ons isolement ligt onze kracht*" (our strength lies in our isolation). I do not believe that our strength lies in our isolation, but in opening our doors wide to proclaim the greatness of our God in all areas of life. What about "our" Reformed confessions? I think we should first of all be sure our statements of faith are biblical and not put the creeds and canons on a pedestal, or use them on a par with Scripture.

I would carefully examine and interview teachers who want to work in our schools and ask that they themselves write out their own statement of faith, in perhaps 20 pages or so, so that the committee interviewing them can read and hear whether this teacher's faith and worldview are biblical.

While I am very thankful for a "Reformed" world and life view, I do not think it should be a matter of pride, or that we are the only ones who have the Truth. Nor do I think that we can capture the correct interpretations on all aspects of life for every century in one Synod, five points of doctrine or the "Three Forms of Unity." The Word of God is living; the Spirit is blowing everywhere; God's people are searching for the Truth as one seeks great treasure. God is able to reveal himself in every century, because it is his work.

That does not mean I discount the past. I think those of the Reformed persuasion who started our schools had very clearly articulated goals and confessions, and I praise God for their perspective. But we must go further than them and find more truth in the Word of God. God's people are all prophets, priests and kings, living stones, his workmanship. By the grace of God, we need to put the new wine into fresh wineskins.

Johanna Campbell

November 16, 2001


Lois Brink

Johanna, you give us an eloquent description of our mission. I share your vision of our schools being communities of Christian truth, ecumenical in our Creation-Fall-Redemption worldview, all one body we, in Christ. However, I recommend that CSI continue to describe us as Christian schools with a distinctly Reformed perspective. To me, this perspective speaks

education in our age and culture.

To be schools with a Reformed perspective tells something to our boards, our parents, our staff and our students. This Reformed perspective says that we are about discernment, not separation; restoration, not abandonment; grace, not condemnation; renewal, not reaction; community, not fortress. This Reformed perspective says something about how we govern our schools and classes, develop our curriculum, relate to our context. It says something about our mission. We not only prepare students, but we give them challenges to be agents of renewal in this world as servants of Christ. We work not only towards excellence in education and the unwrapping of individual gifts but equally for community and responsible discipleship.

The phrase "Christian schools with a Reformed perspective" defines, focuses, challenges each of us involved in CSI Christian schools towards our distinct call to be agents of renewal as well as facilitators of learning.

Lois Brink

November 16, 2001


Tony Kamphuis

Dear Joanna, Lois and Clarence: I also generally refer to our approach to education as "biblical" rather than "Reformed" when I am speaking in general terms or to a general audience. I am not trying to be coy in that, but I think if what we are doing has any merit it is only in that it truly is biblical. I also don't mean to say that other Christians don't have a biblical foundation in their emphases and, in that regard, we may have things to learn. However, when it comes to more in-depth discussions with potential staff members, with potential supporting families, I think we need to be clear and up front about our Reformed approach to education.

I suggest two reasons: (1) Honesty. It's only fair that we don't try to pretend that we can be all things to all people. Furthermore, our unique understanding of Christianity *does* make a real difference in the day-to-day operations and goals of our schools. People with different understandings about the effect of Christianity on our relationship with the world in general and education specifically deserve to be made aware of that. (2) Julius deJager (Curriculum Coordinator of District 11 of CSI) once remarked to me that he saw the Reformed approach to education as one of the greatest gifts that our tradition has to bring to the table where all Christians gather to feast on the good gifts of God. We should celebrate this contribution we can make! Not with hubris, but in the humility that recognizes we have nothing that hasn't been given to us (Corinthians, somewhere), and with a determination to make sure that God's good gift is developed to the fullest potential we can manage!

Tony Kamphuis

November 19, 2001


Pam Adams

Hi all: If a Christian school does indeed work from a Reformed world and life view, then the word Reformed should be used in promotional materials and the mission statement. I don't think it should necessarily be in the name of the school because it might give the impression that the school is associated with a particular denomination. I believe we should identify our schools as Reformed because this helps parents and others understand who we are. There is a great variety of Christian schools out there, and the Reformed label helps us communicate who we are. I agree with Lois when she says that the Reformed perspective has a lot to offer our society. I don't believe that this means we think we have arrived and know better than other Christians. It simply identifies who we are. As Julius deJager is quoted by Tony to have said: the Reformed approach to education is a great gift. I think we are too often apologetic about being distinctive.

What brought my husband and me to the Reformed faith and Christian education was the Reformed emphasis on the transformation of culture rather than retreat. As many of you probably know, the Reformed approach to education is very attractive to other Christian schools. Catholic schools are listening, as are ACSI schools. Instead of trying to hide who we are, let's thank God for the insights we do have. Let's also be open and willing to learn from other Christian school traditions.

Pam Adams

November 22, 2001

Wow! I knew my comments would draw responses! I like your comments, Pam, about being willing to learn from other school traditions. What I am concerned about is that when we say we have the "Reformed" educational approach we think we have arrived. We need to keep on adding fresh insights to our distinctive world view — develop it to the fullest potential we can manage, as you say, Tony. That leaves the door wide open for the Holy Spirit's work in our classrooms and board rooms.

Johanna Campbell

Who Gets a Voice in a "District of Choice"?

Alberta's alternative schools challenge independent Christian schools

by Lisa Martin and John Hiemstra

Lisa Martin is a graduate student in philosophy at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, B.C. John Hiemstra is associate professor of political studies at The King's University College, in Edmonton, Alberta. Dr. Hiemstra is currently doing research on the history of plurality within the educational system of Alberta. This article is a follow-up on the discussion we held in the October issue of CEJ.

Christian schools that operate as alternative programs within the public school system in Edmonton, Alberta, now receive almost full public funding. In Edmonton's self-proclaimed "District of Choice," 31 distinct and fully funded alternative educational programs are offered within the public school system, including several programs with a distinctively religious basis.[1] Edmonton Public Schools has until recently operated like most Canadian school systems — as a majority controlled, non-sectarian system designed to generate and perpetuate approved societal values. Now the public system is opening its doors to alternative programs based on diverse platforms, ranging from language to gender to religion. Where did this remarkable shift in public policy come from, and what does it mean for independent Christian schools in Alberta?

Assimilation-isolation model

Alberta's public school system originated as a "dual confessional system," allowing both Protestant and Catholic faith communities to directly run their own schools. Between 1875 and 1901, the growing Protestant majority in the North-West Territories (present day Alberta) passed a series of school amendments that transformed this system into a "non-sectarian public school system with minority denominational districts." The new system transferred governance of schooling from non-governmental agents to the state- and majority-controlled Department of Education. This public school model advanced the important principles of economic equity between rich and poor and universal accessibility of schooling for all groups.

As a state-dominated model, however, it also reflected the dominant English-Canadian Protestant assumption that the state ought to use public schools to forge its national identity and goals. The monochromatic public schools were designed to assimilate minorities into mainstream values. After Alberta became a province in 1905, minority groups that found themselves at odds with mainstream cultural values were either assimilated into the public school system or isolated in independent schools that were not legally recognized by the province. It wasn't until the 1940s that the Alberta government finally developed a rudimentary legal framework for independent schools.

The first real crack in the foundations of this assimilation-isolation view of public schooling occurred when the government extended public funding to independent schools in 1967. By giving "public" funds to "private" schools, the government of Alberta recognized for the first time that independent schools operating outside of the public system also contributed to the public purpose of education. However, these religious independent schools were still seen as inappropriate for inclusion within the supposedly secular public school system. Albertans who wanted religious schooling for their children were still expected to isolate in private schools.

The second crack in the assimilation-isolation model of schooling came in the mid-1970s, when a variety of types of alternative schools were started in Edmonton and Calgary. Controversy over the religious alternative public schools, however, led in 1982 to a policy against opening religious alternatives in Edmonton, and in 1983, to the closure of existing alternative religious schools in Calgary. Then in 1988, the Alberta government revised Section 16 (1a) of the School Act, specifically enabling local public boards to establish religious alternative schools and programs where numbers warranted. This was the first time legislation explicitly permitted the establishment of alternative school programs on the basis of religion.

The Edmonton experience

In 1995, Emery Dosdall, who became the superintendent of Edmonton Public Schools, pushed the concept of alternative programs within the public system to dramatic new heights. In addition to alternative programs that emphasized academics, fine arts or athletics, Dosdall believed that the inclusion of programs catering to diverse ethnic, religious and linguistic communities would be a positive step toward the goal of including as many students as possible within the public system. He seemed to recognize the varied educational needs of Albertan children and the consequent need for plurality of schools within the public system.

By funding and including alternative programs within the public school system, Dosdall conceded that ethnicity, language and religion are important elements in providing an appropriate education to different kinds of students. Dosdall writes, "For me, public education is about providing every child with an opportunity to reach his or her potential. It's not about providing the same menu for every child. Equity in public education should be about equity of outcomes, not of inputs or processes." [2]

Far greater plurality is allowed within Alberta's public school system today than

West-End Christian School in Edmonton

ever before. The historic assimilatory purposes of the public system, however, provide grounds for the ongoing suspicion that public schools are interested in partnering with independent or alternative schools only in order to domesticate and assimilate them. The pressing questions facing independent Christian school operators in Alberta are these: has the structure and ideological dynamic of Alberta's public school system — non-sectarian public schooling with minority denominational districts — really changed from the old *assimilating* past? Certainly more room has been created for religious, philosophical, ethnic and other forms of plurality within the public system. But will the introduction of alternative schools be accompanied by a change in the deep-structure and ideological goals of Alberta's public school model? Will the new pluralism in public education serve the needs of diverse ethnic, linguistic and religious communities in Alberta, or will these groups lose their ability to deliver truly alternative education to their children?

The emerging character

A clue to the new character of the public school system came with Superintendent Dosdall's comparison of the provision of education to a "market." He argued that Edmonton public schools are *competing for students* directly with independent and charter schools. He writes, "I am convinced public education is fundamental to any democratic society and thriving economy.... This is not rocket science. Serve your *customers* well and they will remain with your system. If you don't satisfy them, someone else will." [3] During his tenure as Edmonton's Superintendent of schools, Dosdall has used the revised School Act to convert Edmonton into a champion of choice in public education. By the spring of 2001, Edmonton Public Schools offered 31 alternative program choices, and "of the district's 209 schools, more than 80 have adopted at least one of these specialties." [4]

The language used to describe Edmonton's new school system raises some important questions. Are alternative programs based on religious, ethnic and linguistic identities being marketed as commodities? Is the old uniform, assimilating public system being transformed into a market system? Is the current system actually designed to serve *individual consumers* of *competing schools* and to encourage parents to take their *business* elsewhere if they don't get the schooling they want?

The idea of individuals "shopping around" for the right school does not fit well with the historical *raison d'être* of independent Christian schools in Alberta. The rationale for independent schools involves the right of faithful, dedicated *communities* to develop curriculum and educational programs for their children around deeply held convictions or cultural traditions that differ from the mainstream society. Independent schools have historically been the primary way for minorities to retain their distinctive identities in a pluralistic society. A market-based school system tends to reduce cultural and religious *communities* to *individual* consumers, and their identities to commodities. Such a system does not seem to recognize the intrinsic justice of allowing *communities* to develop alternative approaches to education.

Governance in alternative schools

The key problem with a market view of schooling is that it stresses consumer sovereignty but does not leave adequate room for parental governance and input concerning the ongoing nature and content of education. Parents are left with little role beyond merely choosing between pre-existing options. If the public system is trying to draw as many students as possible into a market system of educational choice, can this lead to a just pluralism within the public system? Or will the public school system eventually strangle the truly alternative aspects of these new programs once minority groups and parents no longer have direct governance of their schools? Will alternative programs protect and respect ethnic, linguistic and religious identities or market them to the general consumer for their saleable qualities?

Higher public funding often comes with greater leverage for government control.

In order for a pre-existing independent school to enter the public system as an alternative program, the school itself has to come under the governance of the Edmonton Public School board. Employees of the school are employed directly by Edmonton Public Schools and become members of the Alberta Teacher's Association. Support staff must join secular unions.

Another problem is that independent schools that choose not to join the public system face an uncertain future. By including Christian alternatives within the public sector, will the market model undermine Christian schools that remain independent, weakening this group as a whole? Will Christian schools within the public system, with higher pay scales and lower tuition rates, draw teachers and students away from independent schools, leaving these schools with a diminished capacity to serve their respective communities? Finally, will making the public system more inclusive result in decreased public funding, and hence decreased legitimation, for independent schools?

Conclusion

Edmonton Public Schools is making a groundbreaking attempt to accommodate greater plurality within the public system. This action is raising serious questions about the role of parental governance, the ability of alternative programs to retain their truly distinctive features, and the predicament of independent schools that remain outside of the public system. On the other hand, the inclusion of alternative programs within the public system potentially creates an opportunity to do greater justice to ethnic, linguistic and religious communities that depend upon distinctive education to retain their identities in a pluralistic society. Now is the time for Christian schools to seriously evaluate the alternative school phenomena and to constructively engage it with the aim of achieving educational justice for all.

Notes and references

The term "religious" is used throughout this article to refer to specific institutionalized religions, such as Christianity, although the authors acknowledge the religious nature of all approaches to education.

1) Emery Dosdall, "Edmonton Enterprise" in *The School Administrator* of May 21, 2001.

2) Ibid.

3) Ibid (emphasis mine).

4) "Edmonton"s Wide Array of Programs," sidebar in *The School Administrator*, May 21, 2001.

Thinking Thirteen

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Keeping My Adjectives Packed Up

by Joel Bratt
Joel Bratt has taught language arts at J.S. Morton High School in Cicero, Illinois, at Grand Rapids Christian High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and, mostly recently, at Shoreline Christian Middle and High School in Shoreline, Washington.

For the first time in nine years, I haven't had to unpack my adjectives — or anything else in my classroom for that matter. No August angst, restless nights, or weird dreams the week before school starts. No sir, this year I get to keep my adjectives all packed up.

This year I get to answer different questions. *Who made God? What's an opportunity and how come I lost it? Why doesn't the baby like to get poked in the cheek?* Just a few of the questions my four-year-old wants answers to. I am a stay-at-home dad on a one-year leave of absence, and I am signed up for a year of the tough stuff. Don't get me wrong. I absolutely love what I'm doing, and, to be honest, I welcome the temporary departure from adjectives, but I've never really known or appreciated the work my mom did for us, until now.

For the eight years prior to this one I have in one way or another been unpacking adjectives, teaching the ins and outs, rules and regulations, and idiosyncrasies of English grammar to both high school and middle school students. I've taught grammar as part of my English teaching duties in three different school systems, one public and two Christian. These schools have required different things regarding my teaching of English grammar, but for the most part grammar is still something that gets taught. Interesting, considering that the only constancy in the never-ending debate is that few seem to agree about how or when or even if it should be taught at all. And, yet, it gets done.

I must admit, sometimes teaching grammar for a ninth year makes me as tired as the debate itself. I sometimes wonder if 20 years from now I will still have the courage and stamina to unpack the adjectives.

My son attends preschool at the same Christian school from which I took my leave of absence. On the days I go to pick him up from school, one of the most frequently asked questions I receive is whether or not I miss teaching. "Do you miss it?" they ask.

Until now I haven't really had to think about it. My wife and children and I have enjoyed an altogether different rhythm to our lives. Our previous eight years also included medical school for my wife, a masters degree for myself, two new children, residency, three cities, leaving family ... do I miss something that made my life almost chaotic? Until now I answered their questions with: "No, I don't really miss it."

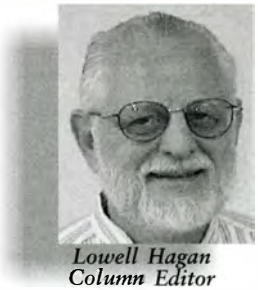
But people want to be missed, and that's the key. If I'm honest with myself, I don't miss the adjectives, the hours of grading on sunny Saturday afternoons, the countdown to Monday morning ... but I do miss the people.

How good it is when a student understands for the first time what a complete sentence is and continues to use it effectively in her writing. How good it feels when students grasp what I mean when I say that their paragraph is unified? It is not lost on me that part of what makes teaching so special is not that adjectives are new, but that I get to be there when they are new for someone else. Teaching is both static and dynamic. The information may not change, but my students' interaction with them is always different.

Last year we had a staff in-service meeting, during which our presenter suggested that what and how we teach is part of the working out of the much larger story of creation, fall, salvation, and restoration. Through Christ's infinite love we are saved, and now we work to restore a fallen creation by sharing that love with others. She went on to suggest that what and how we teach is a kind of hands-on directing of the students' roles in the continuing and unfolding story. Our joy, awe, scholarship, searching, instruction, and relationships — and, yes, even my decision to stay home for a year, are all models for them as actors (those who take action) in the same play.

And so it is that Christ's love is also both static and dynamic. His love for us is constant and continues to seek us out, even when we don't necessarily feel terribly lovable. So, too, does it grow each and every time we share it with those around us.

This year I will revel in my two boys and cherish this wonderful opportunity. I think that maybe the best part about it is that I understand just how good it is while I am in the moment. How often can we say that? Next year, I'll return to Shoreline Christian to unpack a few more adjectives and, better yet, revel in those who help me move into a new school year.



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Harry Potter and the Mill of Rumours

Lowell Hagan

Did you know that there is a link to a Wiccan source on the Harry Potter web site? Or that author J. K. Rowling openly espouses witchcraft and in a published interview said she hoped her books would help destroy children's faith in Jesus? Or that a Pennsylvania computing firm, working on NASA research into the age of the universe, discovered a missing day — just as the book of Joshua would lead us to expect?

If you knew any of those things, give yourself a gullibility check, because these stories are all complete fabrications. They spread by a grapevine of letters, e-mails, newsletters, local church bulletins, and, sometimes, publications of nationally-known Christian organizations trusted by tens or even hundreds of thousands of believers. Inevitably, they also appear among parents and students in our Christian schools. Sometimes they present wonderful opportunities for teaching critical thinking.

Christian legends

The Harry Potter rumors are only the latest short chapter in the long history of Christian misinformation. We should not forget that the Crusades of the 12th century were fueled largely by unsubstantiated rumors, or that the Roman Catholic Church has had to expunge several hundred saints from the official rolls due to the absence of credible evidence concerning their stories. Christian legends can have a very long life, precisely because they are exempted from the standards of proof we would require of a court, or even of a reputable journalist or scholar.

Christian legends are a subset of what have come to be called "urban legends." These are stories that spread quickly without news media assistance, resonate with some deep-seated fear or hope, and like retroviruses, adapt themselves quickly to new surroundings. The hitchhiking angel story that made its way around Seattle was also heard in Chicago, St. Louis, New York, and no doubt dozens of other cities. The missing-day story was variously attributed to sources in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Florida.

Convenient legends

How do we explain the persistence of these legends? And why do so few people take the most elementary steps to check out their reliability? These modern legends are appealing because they confirm things that we want to believe. We find them plausible because they fit nicely into our worldview. In the middle ages, it was widely believed in Europe that lion cubs are born dead, but come to life three days later. The prevailing worldview said that everything in creation had been made for the direct benefit of mankind; everything had some direct spiritual application. Was not Jesus the Lion of Judah? Did he not die and rise from the dead on the third day? Was this truth about lion cubs therefore not a wonderful sermon built into the creation itself?

In a similar way, the story about a computer finding a missing day we present-day Christians find believable because the worldview of our century holds that nothing is reliable until it has been confirmed by scientific means.

Answer to fears

Besides being plausible because they ask us to believe things we find inherently believable, urban legends tend to confirm some deep-seated fear or longing. In evangelical churches steeped in dispensationalist theology, and therefore preoccupied with stories about the Second Coming and the Great Tribulation, the story of the hitchhiking angel is believable because it tells people what they long to believe. Betty Dost, a reporter for the *Washington Christian* newspaper published in Seattle, tried for three months to find an authentic first-person confirmation of this story. She was disturbed to discover that people told the story in an "I have a friend who" format, but upon being questioned the friend said, "Well, it didn't happen to me, but this friend of mine said...."

A good liberal-arts education should have been a defense against the missing-day story. To some who understand the methods and limitations of science, the story was patently false. If the science programs in our schools are not giving this kind of foundation in the methods and the limitations of science, they are failing in one of their most important tasks.

From satire to gospel

This brings us to the recent spate of rumors surrounding the Harry Potter books and film. Anyone with Internet access can quickly disprove the notion of Wiccan links on the Harry Potter web site. As for author Rowling's alleged open advocacy of witchcraft, this rumor began with *The Onion,* a satirical online journal noted for its deliberately outrageous stories. In July 2000, *The Onion* published a totally fabricated "interview" with Rowling which confirmed in graphic terms all the worst fears of Christians who were suspicious of the stories. But some unfortunate souls read the article as if it were accurate journalism, and began an e-mail campaign to spread the word about the evil author and her evil books. The entire original e-mail, and some analysis of it, can be found at http://urbanlegends.about.com/library/weekly/aa080900a.htm?once=true&. Unfortunately, the original *Onion* article is no longer available on line.

The story of the anti-Potter e-mail illustrates a fundamental principle of the whole urban/Christian legend phenomenon: we believe what we find believable. If you believe, as many contemporary Christians seem to, that the forces of light and darkness are locked in a titanic struggle for supremacy in the universe, then the idea of dark forces lying in wait to defeat the forces of light will demand confirmation. The same mind-set that contributes to the success of novels by Frank Peretti and Tim LaHaye can engender paranoia about Harry Potter.

That mind-set is more appropriate to a Zoroastrian or Manichaean faith, however. It is here that we find the story of two divine beings, one good and the other evil, locked in a titanic struggle for mastery of the universe, with the deciding factor being the number of men who join each side. But the Christian gospel tells of an enemy who is not a divine being but a created one, an enemy who has already been conquered, a victory that has already been won, and a battle the outcome of which is already decided. There is no Faustian story in the Bible; human beings do not have to sell their souls to the devil. Hell is the destination of those who refuse to submit to the authority of the God who created heaven and earth. In any discussion about evil, we would do well to remember the words of the Apostle Paul when he spoke on the question of meat that had been sacrificed to idols: "We know that idols do not really exist in the world, and that there is no God but the One."

Classic fairly tale

A useful antidote to the paranoia surrounding the Harry Potter phenomenon is Connie Neal's book *What's a Christian to Do with Harry Potter?* (Waterbrook Press, 2001). Her primary appeal is that Harry Potter not become a new Shibboleth, a touchstone to determine who holds the true faith. She appeals to the Apostle Paul's words concerning the keeping of Jewish holy days and dietary laws. Christians can reach different conclusions about their own attitudes toward the books without insisting that God's leading in their lives is normative for all believers.

Neal treats the convictions of those who object to the novels with respect, but she respectfully disagrees. In one of her more useful sections, she points out that the Potter novels contain the elements of many classic fairy tales. Harry's emotionally abusive aunt and uncle are the counterpart of the wicked stepmother in Cinderella, and the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry is his fairy godmother. He discovers that he has abilities that make him special, something every child wants and needs. However, those abilities do not make him a superior being and certainly not a super man. He finds a home among his own kind of people at Hogwarts, but he is not as skilled at magic as his friend Hermione, nor is he cruel and vindictive like his classmate Draco Malfoy. In these novels, magic is not an ultimate answer to anything.

Just magic

Neal's strongest argument is her analysis of the nature of fantasy literature. Fantasy creates an alternate world, one that is obviously not our own. In Harry Potter's world, there are two kinds of people: Wizards who can practice magic, and Muggles who can not. However, wizards can be born to Muggle parents, and vice-versa. There is no super-race of wizards. In fact, the evil plot Harry and his friends strive against through all the novels is one to create a kind of racial purity. The wicked wizard Voldemort wants to kill off all those who are not born of pure wizard ancestry, whom he and his followers call Mudbloods. An adult reader will quickly find here echoes of our own history, particularly Adolf Hitler's efforts to exterminate the Jews and the reality of racism in our own culture. But here the subject is brought to a level that can be understood by children without bombarding them with horrific images of the Holocaust.

In the world of Harry Potter, magic does not represent Evil, and wizards do not gain their power from any sort of dark force. Magic is as ordinary as electricity, and as wondrous. Magical powers cannot be either achieved or granted; one either has the ability or not. There is nothing in the novels to encourage anyone to seek out mysteries. This does not mean it might not happen. But I recall a news story a number of years ago about a young girl who was paralyzed for life when she tried to ride her skateboard under a truck. She had seen this in a cartoon. Banning Wily E. Coyote would not solve this problem, nor will the banning or forbidding of Harry Potter accomplish any useful purpose.

For my taste, Connie Neal goes too far in seeking ways to spiritualize the story of Harry Potter. Her chapter "Using Harry Potter to Preach the Gospel" is credible, but perhaps we should just let a story be a story, and not read too much into it like those who fear that the mere mention of magic will lead to dire consequence, or try to read too much out of it as if all stories must somehow be freighted with ultimate meaning.

Slouching Toward Bedlam

Please Don't Feed the Teachers

by Jan Kaarsvlam

After some difficulties as the Development Director at Brantford Christian School (where he appears to have "misplaced" the postage budget, "lost" the entire constituent database and "offended" a group of 20 donors by doing an "interpretive dance" about "excessive materialism") Jan Kaarsvlam has accepted a position as Assistant Principal at Manhattan Christian School in Manhattan, Montana.

Gordon Winkle, Bedlam's industrial arts teacher, slammed his sandwich into his mouth, mumbling under his breath about how nobody understood and nobody appreciated the hard work he was doing — especially now that his students had completed their shellacked elephant clock project. Of course, no one understood a word he said because the pimento loaf, sausage, gorgonzola, pickles, provalone, horseradish, peanut butter, and wheat bread (he *was* after all, on a diet) had absorbed all the sound waves.

"Waf's mif Vammerhow, emmyway?" A bit of stray pastrami landed on Christina Lopez's shoulder; her face contorted with disgust as she dabbed with her napkin. Christina had just come from teaching 26 junior English students about the importance of enunciation and clear articulation in everyday life.

"Sowwy, Cwisstwima, I'm juffst berry berry umpset," Winkle said.

"Does anyone here understand what he's saying?" Lopez asked the room at large.

"Salutations, my salubriously sartorial stenographers," said Phys. Ed. teacher Rex Kane as he strutted through the door. In his right hand was a dog-eared copy of *Thirty Days to a More Powerful Vocabulary*. He had just caught Christina's question. "I believe my corpulent comrade is ... (he paused to page quickly through his book, a smile flitting across his face) is bemoaning the lack of appreciation for his diligence in leading his young charges to create his pachydermian chronometer."

"All right," said Lopez to the room at large. "Does anyone know what he's saying?"

John Kleinhut, Bedlam's paranoid librarian, looked back and forth, as if checking for spies, then leaned forward and said, "Can't you guess? It's the same old thing. Vanderhaar doesn't ever recognize when we do any kind of extra work. Winkle knocked himself out, as usual, working on that stupid clock project, and Vanderhaar doesn't give him a word of thanks."

"Thanks?" said wizened math teacher Jane VanderAsh. "Are you kidding? He pulled two students out of four days of calculus to go to the zoo to sketch elephants. Can't they just look in a book? He shouldn't be thanked; he should be fired!"

Winkle's face fell (along with a small drizzle of horseradish from the corner of his mouth).

"Hey, hey," said Rex, the raw emotion of the moment causing him to temporarily forget his new and improved vocabulary, "I think that assignment's pretty good. Those kids take away a lot from that."

"Like what?"said Vander Ash.

"Like an elephant clock," said Kleinhut with a sardonic grin.

Sam Toomer, who had been quietly grading science papers in the corner, spoke up. "Actually, it *is* true what Kleinhut says. A little bit of encouragement from the front office would make it easier for me to do this job. Remember Dribley? He used to write me notes every now and then, whenever he'd hear a compliment from a parent or two. I could keep going on that for a long time."

"Yeah," chimed in Kleinhut, "back when I coached basketball,

he used to give me a gift certificate to Wally's Chophouse whenever we won the tri-county regional. Boy, those were the days."

At the mention of Wally's Chophouse, Winkle's stomach growled.

"Things sure aren't like that now," said Lopez. "My novice debate team took second in state and Vanderhaar never said a word to me. No congratulations, no pat on the back, no nothing. I mean, I don't need a certificate to Wally's, but I wish someone would at least acknowledge that I helped these kids do something good."

"In his defense," said Maxwell Prentiss-Hall, looking up from the current issue of *Christian Counseling Today*, "I think Vanderhaar assumes we know he appreciates what we are doing. He figures that if he calls us to the office, we'll be afraid he's going to chew us out or something. You know, no news is good news."

"Don't be asinine," VanderAsh said. She was especially surly today, perhaps because she herself had just finished her last year of coaching volleyball and had received no acknowledgment from Vanderhaar. She had coached for 28 years, and her principal had not even offered a passing comment of congratulations or thanks in the hallway. "How can you say we shouldn't offer each other an occasional 'thank you'? I know I'm not in this for the money, and I really do think of my job as a calling, but isn't encouragement one of those spiritual gifts you are always talking about? No wonder the kids and even the rest of our community aren't very thankful or encouraging. We sure don't set a very good example."

Prentiss-Hall turned red and peered back into his magazine.

"Why, peradventure we might bethink ourselves to undertake such appreciatory gestures intracollegially, rather than chastising our superior in absentia." Rex had, evidently, had some time to page through his book.

The door swung wide one last time. It was Ed McGoughal, Bedlam's janitor and resident Scotsman, and he was carrying a platter full of Italian pastry. Winkle smiled for the first time since he'd spit on Lopez. "This is from Mr. and Mrs. Rigatoni. There's a card with it. Says thanks for all you teachers do around here."

"Holy canoli!" said Rex. He caught himself before going further and started paging through his book. "What I mean is, sacred ... no, wait, um ... liturgical? Nah, hold on, um ... here it is. I've got it." Rex beamed with pride. "Unprofaned tubular confections of Mediterranean origin!"

Without so much as a nod of thanks to McGoughal, Gordon Winkle and the rest of the Bedlam staff dug in.

Query

A Child's Scribbling Is Writing

Tena Siebenga-Valstar is a former teacher and principal, working on her Ph.D. thesis. We encourage all teachers and principals to submit a question for this column, even if you know the answer. Please send it to Tena Siebenga-Valstar, 168 Windsor Dr., Fort McMurray, Alta., T9H 4R2 or e-mail her at valstar@telusplanet.net.

Children no tabla erasa

Question #1:

I am a beginning first-grade teacher and have been told by a veteran teacher that it is not necessary to have my students writing until after Christmas. What do you think?

Response:

Children begin school believing they are able to write. When schools teach only the letters, what children learn are the constraints of written language. All the wealth of knowledge about writing that children acquire before entering the classroom is set aside so they can center on the arduous task of learning the letters. The children's beginning attempts can only be called errors or mistakes, their work is wrong..... They learn that they cannot write after all. (Steward, 1995, p. 83)

I have been privileged to be in some first-grade classrooms where the belief that children can write is encouraged from the beginning of the year. Believing that children bring with them an understanding of the meaning and purpose of print, they were encouraged to build on that knowledge. As with all learning, there was an acknowledgment of each child's created uniqueness and differing levels of development. At any of the stages of writing development, young children know there is meaning conveyed in their "writing." To an adult it may be a scribble, but to the child the "writing" has a story.

The teacher's reaction and interaction was vitally important. Not only did the teacher listen as children read what they wrote, but asked questions for clarification and made comments to encourage future writing. Initially children traced over the caption they asked the teacher to scribe under a picture they had drawn. It was important for the child to watch the teacher write in order to understand directionality and formation of letters. Children then progressed to writing or copying below what the teacher had written. Interaction with the teacher helped the children extend their captions. From copying letter by letter, students progressed to copying letters, syllables (letter string) and words. Simultaneously, the teacher emphasized concepts such as letter, word, space, and sentence while reading to the children. She familiarized students with common words or spelling patterns. Learning to write is built on talking about writing, and gradually these words and patterns were incorporated in the children's writing.

There was a balance between the performance aspect of writing (how letters are formed) and the composing aspect of writing (creating ideas). The teachers chose to foster spontaneity rather than dampen enthusiasm. The children worked cooperatively with others to help generate ideas, reminded each other of the way they said a sentence or clarified ideas. Parents and other volunteers helped one hour each morning during the writing time. These writing programs honored the children and helped them develop their gifts in an affirming communal learning atmosphere.

Don't give up yet

Question #2:

I have been serving as the vice principal in our school but am considering giving up the position because I feel I am pulled in so many directions. I am teaching as well. Any advice?

Response:

Since the question does not include your story, I will give some general suggestions. If you have not done so recently, return to your job description and, by talking with your principal, redefine what you really are to be doing. If you do not have a job description, it is important to create one in order to clarify your role in relationship to the principal, board, other staff members and parents.

Secondly, it might be helpful to document your time. What do you do with each 10-minute segment of your time? So often the immediate dictates what receives the most time and attention. Do the priorities suggested by your school's vision and your job description receive the most attention? What is receiving an inordinate amount of time? Operating as a team player may take more time than a top-down authority model. What fits with a Christian model of servant leadership? You will have to evaluate your priorities. Could the secretary do some of the administrative work?

Thirdly, you may have to put boundaries around the time you spend on administrative duties. Since you indicate that you are also teaching, you want to insure that your students are your priority. Allow adequate time for preparation, teaching and relating to your students.

Tena Siebinga-Valstar
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One of the reasons you may feel pulled in many directions may be that you are conscientious and dedicated. Sometimes the capabilities which qualify you for the job may, on the other hand, become your worst enemies when you consider your personal life. Are you a people pleaser? Can you say "No" and live with your decision? Can you delegate? You may have to consider your personal boundaries. Are those closest to you able to support you as you work through this?

Try to be honest with yourself as to why you feel pulled in many directions. Is there a solution to the problem, or are you ready to conclude that even though you may have the God-given gifts for the position, you have to step out of the job to work through the situation? Can you work through the process while you continue in the position? Listen to God as he speaks through his Word and Spirit. Take the time to converse with your Best Friend, who knows you better than you know yourself. Ask for direction and peace. Listen to the wise sages that God may send your way.

Teach perspective 70 times 7

Question #3:

Our school is looking at a number of options for professional development. Is it better to offer the Christian perspective course at the beginning of a teacher's career or after a year or two of teaching? Should the professional development courses be offered to the whole staff as well as to the board members?

Response:

Many of the Canadian Christian schools offer "Christian Perspective" courses for professional development; therefore, I will answer this question in that context. The focus of these courses, whether I have taken them or taught them, is to come to a clearer understanding of what it means to teach Christianly and then to find ways to work out the practical implications for the classroom and in your school.

If a beginning teacher does not have a background in Christian education, it certainly would be beneficial to take the course prior to teaching. Many school boards include this as a condition of the teaching contract. As with any teaching, the instructor has to be mindful of each of the students and seek to accommodate their needs. By offering a balance of "teacher-taught" instruction, class discussion, small group interaction, and personal reflection, teachers at various stages of their career can be given opportunity to integrate their learning into their practice.

Because some school boards expect teachers to take these courses on a regular basis (e.g., every three years), some have chosen to have all of the staff members take the course at one time. This allows for a common direction not only at the time of the course, but also throughout the following school year. Reflecting on how their plans actually work out in the classroom can become the focus of professional days. This summer two smaller schools came together. The advantage, beside sharing the costs, was that each staff was able to focus on their own school's direction, and at the same time find a colleague in the other school who taught at the same grade level. Each time I have seen the understanding and cooperation flourish as staff members communally grapple with what makes their school distinctively Christian.

The advantage of having board members attend the course would be that they gain a greater understanding of Christian education and the challenges and joys their teachers face in dealing with the "doing" of Christian education in the classroom and in the school in general. Their participation could, however, change the focus and the classroom dynamics to a certain extent.

What About Ham?

by Pete Post

Pete Post has been a teacher at Elim Christian School in Palos Heights, Illinois, for 27 years.

Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then, they walked in backward and covered their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, he said, "Cursed be Canaan!"

Kids, kids, kids. My wife and I have four of them, although, at ages ranging from 23 to17, they don't quite qualify as kids anymore. If I remember one restaurant qualification correctly — "kiddom" ends about age 10. I remember this because once as I was paying for five adults and one child at Old Country Buffet, beautiful little daughter with innocent honesty piped up, "But Dad, don't you remember, I just turned 10 last week." Her remark cost me an extra $3 despite the fact that the only thing she ate was a chicken leg and a large do-it-yourself sundae.

How do you handle your children? Doesn't it seem to be more of a challenge as they get older? Does everyone really dread having an empty nest — or are there some, like my wife and I, who secretly are hoping the time for parting amicably could come a little faster? I wonder what it must have been like for Noah and the boys. They must have been a closely knit crew after coming through what they did — but could they have wanted a little more space especially after enduring such cramped quarters during the flood?

I'd have to admit that much of my reflectiveness comes after yesterday's family strife. It began with daughter Leah borrowing mother Caryl's mascara and afterwards putting the container in her own drawer in the bathroom. This is a crime that I'm sure Caryl would rank far above seeing one's parent naked, and, therefore, the shrieks reverberated throughout the household. Now Leah had been repeatedly warned not to use anyone else's mascara. Caryl has it on some high authority that the eyes contain more germs than any other part of the body (including an infected appendix), and the passing of germs in the sharing of mascara is a sure thing.

Caryl had to leave for work early, and, since I am a teacher home for most of the summer, I felt much of the burden of discipline falling on me. After Leah's shift at Baker's Square, I picked her up and told her that she would have to pick up her mother's prescription and pay for two new mascaras at Dominick's. Leah continued my mascara education by explaining that they would not have mom's type at Dominick's and that we would have to go to Jewel. The car ride was silent, and the door shut with a little extra emphasis as Leah went in to fetch the product.

Later Caryl called me and played a voice mail that Leah had left for her at work. In it Leah did give an apology of sorts, got a little weepy when she told Caryl that I had called her "learning disabled" for not remembering the mascara rule, but wanting credit for the fact that she had not used Caryl's mascara for at least a month. My sister-in-law later quipped about whether Leah would be able to use the same logic if she had been caught robbing a bank.

Another part of Leah's penance was to clean her room. This also brought about protests in the form of "Have you looked at Luke's or Marc's room lately?" I wonder if Ham tried some of this logic with "What about the time Shem almost killed the female alligator," or "Ask Japheth what really happened to the raven." But Leah was right — somehow the boys had forgotten what drawers are for and the floor was strewn with clothing of every sort. Whether clean or dirty was anyone's guess.

I was determined to set things in order and eliminate this somewhat reasonable part of Leah's protest. I could tell that most of 18-year-old Luke's shirts from working on the garbage truck were dirty. So I broke another of my partner's rules (Caryl does not do children's laundry after high school graduation) and washed, dried and hung up the shirts in his closet. I would hope that a warning would be good enough for Luke to respond positively. I wondered if Ham might have been a bit of a troublemaker since he doesn't appear to get the benefit of an additional chance.

21-year-old Marc's room was a different story. Marc went to trade school for one year after high school — an excellent decision for him, although I enjoyed collecting various military "goodies" by answering his letters from the armed forces (with his permission, of course). Marc has been working full time for almost two years now as a mechanic. He has a bedroom in the basement and Caryl and I try to give him space as an adult and still enforce house rules about no alcohol or smoking in the house, for instance. It is sometimes a precarious truce as Marc tends to push limits; yet, we know he serves as an example to younger siblings. To his credit, Marc has a good heart, and, when Leah recently totaled one of our vehicles, she called Marc to come to her rescue. We were not aware that he had her memorize his cell phone number. A wonderful revelation.

I began the task of reclaiming Marc's room in the name of everything clean and reasonable. I organized, dusted, swept and

nearly wept — not from emotion but from what I found when I uncovered the little refrigerator I had given Marc upon high school graduation (with a note wishing him well and reminding him that the fridge was not for anything alcoholic). The refrigerator was not running, and, when I opened it, I realized why the room had smelled so bad. Apparently, the last time Marc had used the fridge, he left some beef and gravy, which had transformed into mold and maggots. At this point, I felt that a Noah curse may have been appropriate. I cleaned up everything but the inside of the fridge, leaving rags, bucket, plastic bags, and a new bottle of 409 for Marc to use when he got home.

Now it's a day later. Leah and Caryl seem to be on good terms and, it is to be hoped, enjoying their own mascaras. Luke is showing off his new CDL license, which allows him to drive a truck, and has decided to buy a used car since the one Leah finished off will no longer be available. Marc has promised to get an old Cutlass that he has been working on out of our garage today. We talked about it and put it on the calendar, but it's not gone yet. We visited oldest son Matthew in Grand Rapids last week — he's a Calvin grad and works as a chemist but wants to move to Colorado. So here I sit musing about Noah in a clean home with no one around but Eddy, Marc's part coyote, part fox, part dog sleeping on the bed next to me. No one would even know if I took off my shirt to get a little more comfortable.

So what do you think? Was Noah a good dad? Did Ham deserve such a punishment? And why is the curse on his son instead of Noah himself? I bet a good commentary might help but would ruin my play of ideas. I don't recall hearing any sermons on Noah's nudity or his harassing of Ham. But I like to think about some stories that we tend to cut short in story telling. I can't tell the "Prodigal Son" without feeling sorry for the older brother; "Jonah and the Whale" is fantastic but, without the "Worm versus the Gourd," incomplete; "Gideon and Samson" rules; and my students love the story of lefty Ehud sticking it to Eglon while his servants are trying to figure out why he's been in the bathroom so long.

What would happen if you were sitting around drunk and naked? What do you think your children would do? In my case, Leah, of course, would be mortified, but it would be great ammunition if ever she were caught in a compromising position. I can hear it now, "Well at least I wasn't the one typing naked on-line!" I would think that Matt would come in and try to determine what the problem was, perhaps take a blood sample to analyze what had caused dear old Dad to have such a reaction. Marc, I'm pretty sure, would get the VCR or digital camera — perhaps even have a few friends over. But Luke — I think Luke might have just left, like Ham did, and not bother to tell anybody, ever. OK, so Dad was drunk and naked, what about it?

But wasn't getting drunk and naked Noah's fault? Why is it that poor Ham has to bear the brunt of the old man's fury when he awakens from his stupor? And what about those tattletales, Shem and Japheth? At least, I assume that they told dear old dad what younger brother Ham had done. And don't you wonder (at least, I do) if maybe they had put little brother up to going in to the tent to see what was wrong with dad in the first place?

I wonder how Ham broke the news to his elders. Could he have said, "You guys have got to see this," or, maybe, "Boy, dad's in pretty good shape for a guy of 600." Maybe he just said, "You guys had better get in there." At any rate, it seems as if Ham has broken a vital rule, at least for his family. He has apparently shown a lack of respect for his father, a violation which will be taken out on his son.

Families are funny things. God gives them to us and, just maybe, enjoys watching parents try to manage their kids — like a grandfather who remembers raising his own. Children teach you how to compromise. In a family of three boys and one girl, I never thought that I would be the only one without pierced ears! I hope that Noah patched things up with Ham despite the curse. If we read a little further in Genesis 10, we find out that some of Ham's descendants built great cities in Babylon and Assyria. One of them built Nineveh — and even God (over Jonah's protests) gave them another chance.

Book Reviews

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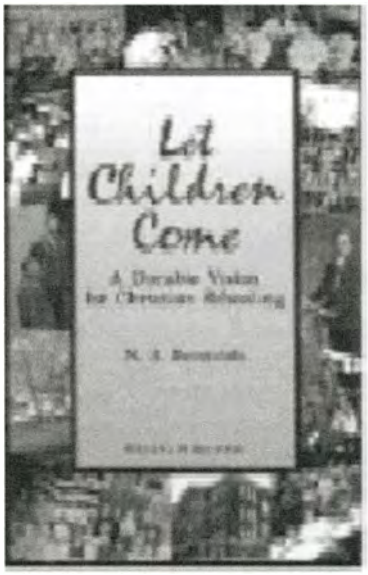
N. H. Beversluis, *Let Children Come: A Durable Vision for Christian Schooling*. Gertrude Beversluis, Editor. Grand Rapids: Christian Schools International. 2001, 168 pages, including Statement of Principles, Bibliography.
Reviewed by Steve J. Van Der Weele, Professor of English (emeritus), Calvin College.

A few weeks ago, the 60 Minutes program featured a group of teachers, parents, and children who have adopted a freewheeling approach to education, one which professional respondents, along, one hopes, with most viewers, found very unsettling. No formal curriculum is used, no requirements are stipulated, no specific goals for the learning process have been adopted. Improvisation is the order of the day. The child may do pretty much what he wishes to do, and may reject what he finds boring or difficult. No central core of subject matter is acknowledged; no subject is thought to be more important than another. The child will come to learn what he needs to know through experience — foreign languages, trigonometry, construction of a sentence, or scientific concepts. Nothing is obligatory.

Prof. Beversluis's educational program could not be more opposed to the one proposed by the misguided folk whom host Ed Bradley challenged vigorously. It is not that Beversluis discourages spontaneity, experimentation, initiative. But he properly, and profoundly, relates the whole educational enterprise to a Christian anthropology, to a definition of human beings as Image Bearers of God, and to God's overarching covenant relationship with humans and nature — a comprehensive vision of the nature and purpose of humanity.



With great energy and fervor, with an almost oratorical style, he rouses his reader (and audience) to a creative and vital appropriation of the best educational and theological wisdom of the past, all brought to bear in the arena of the classroom where youngsters are to be taught the soul-sculpturing and mind-enlarging subjects of a creation brought into being by a loving and extravagant God. He relates education to the reality of time, to the processes by which we progressively achieve maturity (or fail at this) through choice, commitment, informed attitudes.

We owe a debt of thanks to Henry Beversluis's wife, Gertrude, for her willingness to work through the files of her late husband, files replete with notes, lectures, observations, articles, and correspondence, and then arrange for the publication for this selection of his representative ideas and convictions about the cause that was at the center of his life — Christian education. She has, chosen well. Spouses in due time learn the art of finishing their partners' sentences.

Gertrude has discerned the basic contours and emphases of his lively discourse about a Christian philosophy of education, avoiding overlapping except where he deals with a given subject in different words, with different nuances. She lets us see his mind at work, as he grapples with foundational principles on which education must rest if it is to be Christian education. In her Preface, she identifies specific and general sources of the chapters: two chapters from his dissertation, addresses and essays prepared for the eastern schools and the National Union of Christian Schools (now CSI), as well as articles for *The Reformed Journal*. As a colleague of Henry, I say with confidence that we have here the best of his thought, consisting, truly, of a massive body of good educational sense.

Beversluis is concerned about the religious underpinnings of a Christian school — a topic utterly remote from the group of folk I discuss in my beginning paragraph. His starting point is the time in early CRC history when parents were urged to look at schools not as church schools, as an arm of the parish, an extension of the religious ministry of the church. The church instructed the parents to find other reasons, "reasons of their own," to venture into the field of Christian education.

In a sense, the discourse in this book constitutes Henry's response to this challenge. The church is crucial, of course. But philosophers of education need to work out the implications of the doctrines, creeds, redemptive proclamation, and cultural mandate for believers whose piety — Calvin's metaphor of religion is the burning heart — must be complimented by a vigorous participation in the life of the world. He strives always for wholeness, inclusiveness, integration, the big vision, syntheses of apparent oppositions and dichotomies. He sees the Christian life as a dynamic reality and calls for the Christian community to prepare its children for "a vibrant affirmation of our cultural calling."

Henry's discourse is laced with such words as robust, dynamic, as education being intentional, affirming, as requiring active response, participation, choice. His program is a demanding one, not one for the complacent or indifferent. His summons is for the Christian community — and he supposes that Lutherans and Catholics harbor the same goals — to adopt a comprehensive, all-embracing life orientation, a life of stewardship *coram dei* — before the face of God.

We must regard ourselves as part of "a community of memory" — affirming our debt to the good traditions of people who have

prepared the way for our generation. Liberalism won't do; it lacks roots, depth, ultimate commitment. Fundamentalism won't do, either. It tends toward narrowness, heresy-hunting, cliches, slogans, tinny songs, and fails to do justice to the full counsel of biblical truth. Education for this group is located in the context of redemption rather than where true Reformed thought locates it — in creation.

Certain emphases receive greater attention than others. Beversluis's exploration of the idea of covenant is crucial. As a metaphor, it serves as the biblical framework for a world-and-life view as well as a personal commitment to a lively faith in God's redemptive program. His idea of covenant includes "the whole of God's condescending intercourse with human beings" (63). It implies a God who created and a creature who responds. The commands that come to us in this relationship are three: to love God in true worship, to love each other in true community, and, under the controls of these loves, to do the world's work (64).

Chapter 7, "Bad Dichotomies," deals with the sad array of the contentions which are part of our history — contentions based on reductionism which have kept us as a community from reaching the level of maturity we should have reached by now. The solution to these dichotomies is often "not one or the other, not the two separately, or in tandem, but both together, undivided," as the way to wholeness. I find Chapter 9 a provocative one — "The Religion/Education Analogy" — in which he explores the affinities between curriculum and revelation, between the process of learning and believing, between "knowing" in the Semitic sense and a student's response indicating understanding.

Ultimately, Beversluis reminds us, we are working to bring about not merely a number of individual believers who are concerned, in a narrow sense, about being rescued from punishment for their sins; on the basis of our transformed life, we are engaged in building a kingdom — the *civitas dei* — the kingdom which is already here and now, but which is also, as we long for and hope, yet to come. And the education of our children must be designed to give them increasingly more substance to be Christian with.

Brief Review Notes

by Bianca L. Elliott, teacher in Linwood, Kansas

Mary E. Williams, editor, *Education: Opposing Viewpoints*. San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2000.

Each volume in the series *Opposing Viewpoints* begins with this quotation by John Stuart Mill:

"The only way in which a human being can make some approach to knowing the whole of a subject is by hearing what can be said about it by persons of every variety of opinion and studying all modes in which it can be looked at by every character of mind. No wise man ever acquired his wisdom in any mode but this." Every volume provides progressively more challenging questions and indicates the web sites where further information can be found.

As a public school teacher, I have found the education volume a useful, balanced analysis of the state of public education in America. The questions are timely. Examples: What is the state of public education? Should parents be allowed to choose their children's school? What role should religious and moral values play in public education? How can education be improved? The book does not shy away from references to sex, drugs, and violence, but these issues are handled candidly and appropriately.

Kenneth Leithwood, Robert Aitken, and Doris Jantzi, *Making Schools Smarter: A System for Monitoring School and District Progress*. 2nd edition. Corwin Press.

President Bush's plans for reform in education emphasizes accountability. As a public school teacher in Kansas, I have experience with accountability and standards in state and local positions as well. This is a hands-on book, with multiple surveys and forms that expedite the task of responding to calls at various levels for demonstrating progress towards designated goals. I have found it eminently useful, and recommend it to all building and district leaders who are involved in the task of showing how well their schools are meeting the designated standards.