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The Trees of the Fields



Bert Witvoet

Out of respect for God's delight

When I think of the harm we human beings have done to the world we live in, I think of the creation story in Genesis 1. As the drama of the beginning world unfolds, and the divine maker of heaven and earth speaks the words "Let there be," we hear six times the phrase spoken by some unseen stage manager: "And God saw that it was good." This expression of approval is reiterated in verse 31 where Act I, Scene I, is summed up as follows: "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good."

It is evident from the story told in Genesis 1 that God was pleased. He had made something that deserved his own praise. When God thinks that something is very good, it means that he has answered to all expectations and that the brave new world he has fashioned out of nothing is perfect.

And then comes the great historical "BUT." But at Satan's instigation and with his help, we have almost succeeded in wrecking God's work of art. God said: "Let there be" and we answered: "Let's make a mess of it." God took pride in the world he had made; we acted as if we couldn't care less. Some caretakers we turned out to be!

And then, wonders of wonders, follows the second great historical "BUT." But God was not about to let us ruin his project. He devised a restoration plan that would put the "good" back into his creation. He announced: "Let there be light, the true light that gives light to every human being," and it was so. God saw what Jesus did, and he saw that it was good. He even made a point of letting us hear a voice that said, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased."

Jesus came into the world to restore God's handiwork, to confront the Great Saboteur, and to set us, Satan's al-Qaeda accomplices, free so that we might join forces with Christ and take up the project of fulfilling God's original intent with this world. "Behold, I make all things new."

Filled with delight

Well, that just about sums up my earth-keeping theology. Of course, I could quote from Proverbs 8 and show you that wisdom cries out to us to choose her instruction. I think all educators should prick up their collective ears and hear what she has to say. Wisdom was there at the beginning of time apparently. Maybe she was the stage manager that told us that God thought that what he had made was good.

Here is wisdom's testimony:

"The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old; I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began. When there were no oceans, I was given birth, when there were no springs abounding with water; before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was given birth, before he made the earth or its fields or any of the dust of the world.

"I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep, when he established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep, when he gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep his command, and when he marked out the foundations of the earth.

"Then I was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind.

"Now then, my sons and daughters, listen to me; blessed are those who keep my ways. Listen to my instruction and be wise; do not ignore it. Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway. For whoever finds me finds life and receives favor from the LORD. But whoever fails to find me harms himself; all who hate me love death" (Proverbs 8:22-36).

Did you catch the enthusiasm and the divine joy that wisdom exudes as she recalls the fun that she and God had when God made this world, using wisdom as his blueprint — his design partner: "Then I was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in humankind."

How does that make you feel, listening to wisdom while throwing an aerosol spray paint can into your garbage pail?

A broken teapot

A week ago, I got a package in the mail from a cousin of mine. In the package were 25 pieces of delicate china. Those pieces were once a hand-painted Japanese teapot that my dad gave to my mother in the 1930s. It was left behind at the time of our immigration to Canada in 1950. Years later, it ended up in my cousin's hands, though badly fractured. But because these pieces had represented an object of delight to my parents, a gift of love and joy, I told her I would

take it off her hands.

I took the time to carefully glue all these pieces together again with epoxy. The result amazed me. Yes, there are a few gaping holes I can't fill, and, yes, the teapot will never be able to function as it was intended (in other words, I cannot look at the teapot and say, "It is good"); still, I take delight in seeing it sit on our china cabinet as I admire the elegant shape and the finely colored porcelain. But most of all, I wanted badly to redeem it because my dad had taken delight in it as he gave it to my mother at the dawn of my life on earth.

Environmental glue

Shouldn't we look at the world in the same way? Shouldn't we weep when we think of how carelessly we people of the world have treated God's masterpiece. How can we not tremble at the thought of our shabby treatment of this gift of love! We deserve to be fired as earth-keepers, the whole lot of us. But for some reason (I guess the reason lies in the delight God had in humankind) God is willing to sign us on again.

Maybe all we can do in some cases is glue the environment together again, even though some realists will remind us that all the king's horses and all the king's men could not put Humpty Dumpty together again. Of course, nature is more resilient than an egg. Maybe it's too late to redeem some portions of our world. But, out of love for our heavenly father, we should try, I think.

In order for us to be useful in this project, however, we need to search out wisdom. We need to find out how we can stop this mad rush towards our own extinction. "For whoever finds me," says Wisdom, "finds life and receives favor from the Lord. But whoever fails to find me harms

himself; all who hate me love death."

Fatal attractions

The last statement explains all the irresponsible acts we have committed against God's good world. Let's face it, we as a civilization love death. Don't be fooled by our society's attempts to lengthen lives through stem cell research, or our obsession with youthful looks, and our distaste for funerals. We love death in all its disguises — we easily surrender to addictions, we are so comfortable with over-use of energy, we unthinkingly consume junk food that has been cleverly designed to tempt our palate, we abort unwanted children for our convenience, we avoid physical exercise, prayer and sacrifice, we readily use pesticides and herbicides to keep up with the neighbors, we don't respect the marriage vow, we don't mind exploiting underdeveloped nations, we inject hormones and drugs into our cattle, we litter the land and pollute the water systems, we put the economy ahead of life-giving forests and swamps. We do all this because we believe Satan's lie that we will not surely die when we eat the forbidden fruit.

But wisdom keeps on calling out to us to join her in being "filled with delight day after day, rejoicing in the Lord's presence and rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in humankind." The question we as educators must face is: "How eager are we to join the project of restoring God's world?" Do our lessons breathe the second great "BUT"? In a North-American evangelicalism that tends to reduce salvation to soul rescue, are we even comfortable with the thought that we can store up treasures in heaven by treasuring God's good earth?

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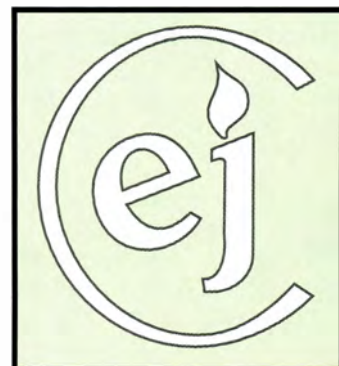
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Behold the Birds of the Air!

The Educational Importance of Environmental Awareness

by Calvin B. DeWitt

Calvin DeWitt is professor of environmental studies and a fellow of the Teaching Academy at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He also is director of Au Sable Institute, which serves 56 Christian Colleges and Universities as well as K-12 schools in northern Michigan and western Washington with courses and programs in environmental education.

I am a teacher in Madison, Wisconsin, and have been a student of God's creation for all of my life. My family and I attend Geneva Campus Church on the campus of the University of Wisconsin.

It was here several years ago that Rev. Vander Hoven came into town for three months to fill a vacancy in Geneva's ministry. I saw him often during my student coffee hours at Memorial Union, where he frequently engaged students at neighboring tables. Noting what books they were reading and what courses they were taking, he would compassionately tailor the Good News to their situation.

Some days I would move over to his table where, when not conversing with students, he wrote tracts for *Our Daily Bread*. And as we conversed there about my love for God and God's Creation, he, time and again, insisted that I take him on a field trip. I agreed to do so.

An answer for God

Bill and I selected a day, and we lived that day fully from before sunrise and well into the night, trekking through the wonders of southern Wisconsin and the Baraboo Hills. He told me that he discovered Creation that day, although he already had lived more than 65 years, and he praised God verbally for this while we walked through Parfrey's Glen.

Later I learned that, following our time

together, he took a full year off from his "retirement" to study Creation. His reason? So that he would not be embarrassed, as he put it, to be asked in the Final Judgment what he thought of God's Creation and be able to say he had but been on a single field trip.

Walk and talk

You and I are teachers. We teach from Christian motivation. We honor God in our lives and our teaching and often sing "Praise God all Creatures here below" as we worship in school and church. Following our great teacher and mentor, Jesus Christ, we may even lead our students along city sidewalks, across the school lawn and through fields and woodlands teaching as Jesus did, on field trips! Follow right behind me here; behold this lily! Stand by my side here; behold the birds!

Jesus almost always taught on field trips. And this for good reason. For, as we learn from Colossians 1:15-20, he created all these marvelous things, and in him they all are held together. Teaching in the field was for him a "natural" thing to do! So, too, with our teaching in Creation: bringing ourselves and our students to experience Creation's remarkable testimony through seeing, hearing, smelling and touching is also a "natural" thing to do.

As it is inconceivable that we would come to admire the great artist Rembrandt and not know his paintings or care for his masterpieces, so it is inconceivable that we should love the Creator but not seek to know his creative works or care for his Creation. We, too, teach on field trips, observing, reflecting, listening, talking, recording, drawing, expressing, praying, praising.

A talking book

Our teaching in the field has a great deal to do with our knowledge of God and

God's love for the world. One of the creeds explains how we know God this way: "We know him by two means: First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to see clearly the invisible things of God, even his everlasting power and divinity, as the apostle Paul says (Romans 1:20). All which things are sufficient to convince people and leave them without excuse. Second, he makes himself more clearly and fully known to us by his holy and divine Word, that is to say, as far as is necessary for us to know in this life, to his glory and our salvation."¹

Bountiful care

On that field trip together, Bill and I were refreshed in our knowledge that the heavens tell the glory of God, that the creatures testify to God's eternal power and divine majesty! Creation praises God for God's manifest love for the world (Psalm 148). We, with the psalmist, learn from Creation that God's provisions for life and breath are everywhere evident (Psalm 104). They are so numerous and abundant, so interwoven with each other, that we cannot give them their proper due.

God's bountiful care is simply inexpressible in words; God's love breathes in the air, it shines in the light, it distills sweetly in the dew and rain. If we step out of our made-worlds of enclosed spaces, images, and virtual reality to experience Creation anew, we experience God's love for the world, we see clearly God's everlasting power and divinity. God's provisions for Creation are magnificent, deserving our undivided attention and calling forth our praise.

Three steps

One thing a field trip can bring to us

and our students is awareness. Awareness of Creation and God's sustaining action in the world is the beginning of understanding. Awareness leads to appreciation of God and Creation. And appreciation can lead to stewardship — stewardship of Creation, of all the materials and energy that come from Creation, and God's provisions for the myriad of wonderful creatures that inhabit the earth (including ourselves!).

Here is how this can be expressed:

(1) Awareness: seeing, identifying, naming, locating; (2) Appreciation: tolerating, respecting, valuing, esteeming, cherishing; (3) Stewardship: conserving, restoring, serving, keeping, entrusting

Awareness means taking off our "blinders," getting out of our offices and living rooms, leaving our virtual "worlds," and wanting to know and to name the creatures we see, providing ourselves and our students with peace and reflective time, and entering the natural world intentionally to discover God's marvelous work.

Appreciation means tolerating such things as worms and hyenas and respecting creatures like bears and whales, but goes beyond this to value and cherish God's creatures and creation in such a way that we echo God's declaration, "It is good!"

Stewardship means appropriate and caring use and conservation of Creation, but goes beyond this to make sure that by our and others' actions Creation is not degraded, that the damage we do to it is repaired, that we pursue right living and work to spread right living in the world.

Stewardship means serving: serving before we act adversely on Creation (pre-serving); serving reciprocally so that service to us by God and Creation is returned with service of our own (con-serving); bringing

back to fulness and fruitfulness what has been damaged and smeared (re-storing, reconciling); helping our students and community to hold in trust what we and others have learned, preserved, conserved and restored (en-trusting); and serving God responsibly and worthily by tending, caring for, and keeping God's word and world.



God's response

Creation has an immense amount to teach us as one of the two great books! The other great book, of course, is the one by which God makes himself more clearly and fully known to us. And from this great book, the Bible, we come to understand that we are made to image and mirror God's love for Creation (including God's love for ourselves and other people)!

From Scripture we learn that when human beings make a mess of things, God has responded and still responds: first, by cleansing the earth of unresponsive and ir-

responsible people with water while saving the lineages of God's creatures (Genesis 6-9), next, by taking on flesh and matter in Jesus Christ (Luke 2:1-22), by giving everlasting life to those who join with Jesus Christ in holding together and reconciling the world (John 3:16; Colossians 1:15-20), and by dwelling in us as the Holy Spirit (Psalm 51:11; Luke 11:13), and, ultimately, by cleansing the earth with a refiner's fire that destroys those who destroy the earth (Revelation 11:18), and renewing all things (Revelation 21:5).

Believing on Jesus, sent because of God's love for the world, is but the beginning of understanding and wisdom, much as awareness of God's Creation is but a beginning. Our believing what Jesus tells us, our responding to the Holy Spirit, and our imaging God's love for the world necessarily lead to deep appreciation. And deep appreciation necessarily leads to responsive and responsible stewardship of God's gifts: God's Word and God's Creation.² Here is how this sequence can be visualized:

- (1) Belief in God: Awareness: experiencing, praying, asking, telling
- (2) Worship and Praise: singing, listening, esteeming, cherishing
- (3) Stewardship of God's gifts: doing, serving, reconciling, restoring

High beauty

During their time in Madison, Bill and his wife were invited to our house for an Easter dinner, along with others who had not left town. On Easter morning he preached a wonderful sermon at Geneva. It was a sermon and service filled with joy, celebration, and testimony. The Holy Spirit moved us there to stand in awe of Christ's affirmation of created matter in

his own incarnation and resurrection. We were moved by God's affirmation of the Creation in all of this, recalling that on Christ's coming in Bethlehem heaven and nature sang, that rocks, fields, and hills repeated the sounding joy. "He comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found!" We came better to love our Lord and again were amazed to hear that Mary had mistaken him for the garden keeper! Gardener Jesus, King of Creation! We responded: "Truly I'd love you, truly I'd serve you!"

Later, I was at home slicing the turkey and ham Ruth had prepared, but the Vander Hovens had not arrived. It had been two hours since the service, and the many present were becoming concerned. It was time to sit down for dinner, and, as we were doing so, they came in through the front door. Welcoming them I said to Bill, "Did something happen to delay you; are you alright?" "Oh," he said, "We went to Bethel Lutheran! Wouldn't miss High Church on Easter!"

Well, one Christmas Eve, Ruth, I, and Gary participated in High Church Bethel Lutheran, savoring the knowledge that this, too, is part of God's Creation. I thought of Bill and the wholeness he was working to develop in his life. His was a full spectrum: God and Creation, his own expository sermons, and High Church.

Low beauty

But there is more. If you would have followed his route on Sundays, you often would not only end up in a church, but also in a barn. He is a stone-cutter, Bill is. He works with his hands, loves to care for things, create things, all under the eye of his Lord. And so ... on Sundays he often would find people of his kind by visiting a local barn, not doing chores, but worshiping there with his dear friends in Christ. These were his Amish neighbors with

whom he affirmed the material world in tangible ways, as the Carpenter he followed had done two thousand years before him!

Lutheran Liturgy, Evangelical Spirit, and Amish Earthiness. All three support and sustain Christian life and worship! Some Christians start with liturgy and remain in the liturgical beauty and comfort of High Church. Some start with the Spirit and remain in the Spirit-filled church. Some start in the barn and sink their roots into the soil. And still other worshipers, while not abandoning their beginnings, embrace the whole of worship, as my friend Bill does. All honor God as the Maker of Heaven and Earth and seek to be good stewards of God's Creation.

Start with beholding

In our day, the first step toward Creation stewardship is often called environmental awareness. The Bible, however, moves beyond awareness to *beholding*. It tells of people inspired and told by their teachers to behold! *Behold* the Lamb of God ... (John 1:29); *Behold* the fowls of the air (Matt 6:26). Theologian Joseph Sittler tells us that the word "behold" is directed toward God's creatures with a kind of tenderness which suggests that things in themselves have their own wondrous authenticity and integrity.... "To behold means to stand among things with a kind of reverence for life which does not walk through the world of the nonself with one's arrogant hat on ... it is ... a rhetorical acknowledgment of a fundamental ecological understanding of man whose father is God but whose sibling is the whole Creation."³

Embracing God and the whole of God's Creation — people included — enhances the opportunity to infuse all of life with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Liturgical services remind us to remember all the elements of worship and to worship God in the splendor of holiness. Spiritual services

make sure that we commune with God with heart-felt words that come from within and express praise and petitions that go beyond the words of liturgy. Earthy services make sure that we remember that God became material flesh in a material world — incarnate in Jesus Christ — and that he has come to be present with us in his own Creation which he so loves. And all three — liturgical, spiritual, and earthy — bring us to know that we should so behave on earth that heaven will not be a shock to us (as another pastor friend of mine puts it!).

We must in all of this remember our Creator (Ecclesiastes 12:1) and follow our master teacher Jesus into the field. Whether we take a sidewalk safari to study the remarkable plants of sidewalk cracks, or walk through woodlands, prairies, and marshes to observe them and their inhabitants, we and our students should not only become aware, but should also *behold* what we see. And our beholding should lead us all to appreciation and to stewardship of the great heritage of God's world and God's word that is entrusted to our love and care. But first, *behold* the plants of the sidewalk, lawn and field; *behold* the birds of the air!

Notes:

1. Belgic Confession, Article II [1561]. Philip Schaff, 1931, *The Creeds of Christendom*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker.

2. For stewardship of Creation, see C.B. DeWitt. 1994. *Earth-Wise: A Biblical Response to Environmental Issues*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: CRC Publications. ISBN 1-56212-057-3 (TBA)

3. Joseph Sittler. 1970. Ecological commitment as theological responsibility. In: Steven Bouwma-Prediger and Peter Bakken. 2000. *Evocations of Grace: Writings on Ecology, Theology, and Ethics*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 76-86.

RETHINKING THE ENVIRONMENTAL DEBATE

by Chris Steenhof

Chris Steenhof is a teacher of English, Bible and media studies at Bulkley Valley Christian High School in Smithers, British Columbia.

Raise the issue of the environment in a Christian school classroom, and the response will likely be passionate and diverse. There are very few subjects that bring such a fervent reaction from Christian school students and from the larger Christian community. Because of the wide range of beliefs surrounding the topic, many Christian schools tend to treat the issue in a haphazard and terse manner. While paying tribute to the importance of caring for God's earth, educators often miss an opportunity to deal with an issue that cogently brings into focus important worldview conflicts and allows for the implementation of a transformational model of education.

Recent events in both the United States and Canada have dramatically focused attention on the worldview questions surrounding the environmental issue. Last year, U.S. President George Bush rejected the Kyoto Protocol, an agreement designed to reduce carbon dioxide emissions in the developed world. In his own words, "placing CO₂ emission controls does not make economic sense for America." In Canada, the environment was virtually ignored in the last federal election campaign, which focused mainly on the economy.

Left-wing-phobia

While this conflict between the "needs" of the economy and the importance of the environmental movement can be used effectively in many different curricular areas, many Christian schools are avoiding it altogether, fearing a possible explosion of controversy.

There are many reasons why this is so. While supporters of Christian education

are often politically conservative, much of the support for environmental issues comes from political parties and special interest groups on the political left. Groups such as *Greenpeace* and the *Sierra Club* have been raising the ire of politically conservative thinkers for years. Regardless of the legitimacy of environmental concerns, differences in political ideologies have alienated Christians from the practices and beliefs of radical activists.

Furthermore, a division in religious beliefs also separates Christians from many of the activists within the established environmental movement. The New Age and Eastern religious influences within the environment movement justifiably cause the Christian community concern. While a few evangelicals — i.e., Tony Campolo and Loren Wilkinson — suggest that Christians can learn much about caring for the earth from Eastern religions, most conservative thinkers are much more cautious.

Behind the split

Finally, there is a deep split among Christian authors and thinkers on the assumptions and scientific research of the environmental movement. In his book *Whatever Happened to the American Dream?* financial guru Larry Burkett accuses environmental activists of hijacking the political process on the basis of inconclusive and sometimes erroneous scientific data. On the other side of the spectrum, Bill McKibben, author of *The End of Nature* and *Maybe One: A Case for Smaller Families*, spells out a cogent argument for a "fragile earth" and gives Christians a remedy for the problem: namely, a rethinking of our consumptive and materialistic worldview.

This dichotomy of thought within the Christian community should arouse the interest of Christian educators in North America. Such a division in opinion usu-

ally signals a deeper, more philosophical difference. In this case there seems to be not only a division between many Christians and the sometimes radical philosophies of environmentalists, but a split in worldviews within the evangelical community as well.

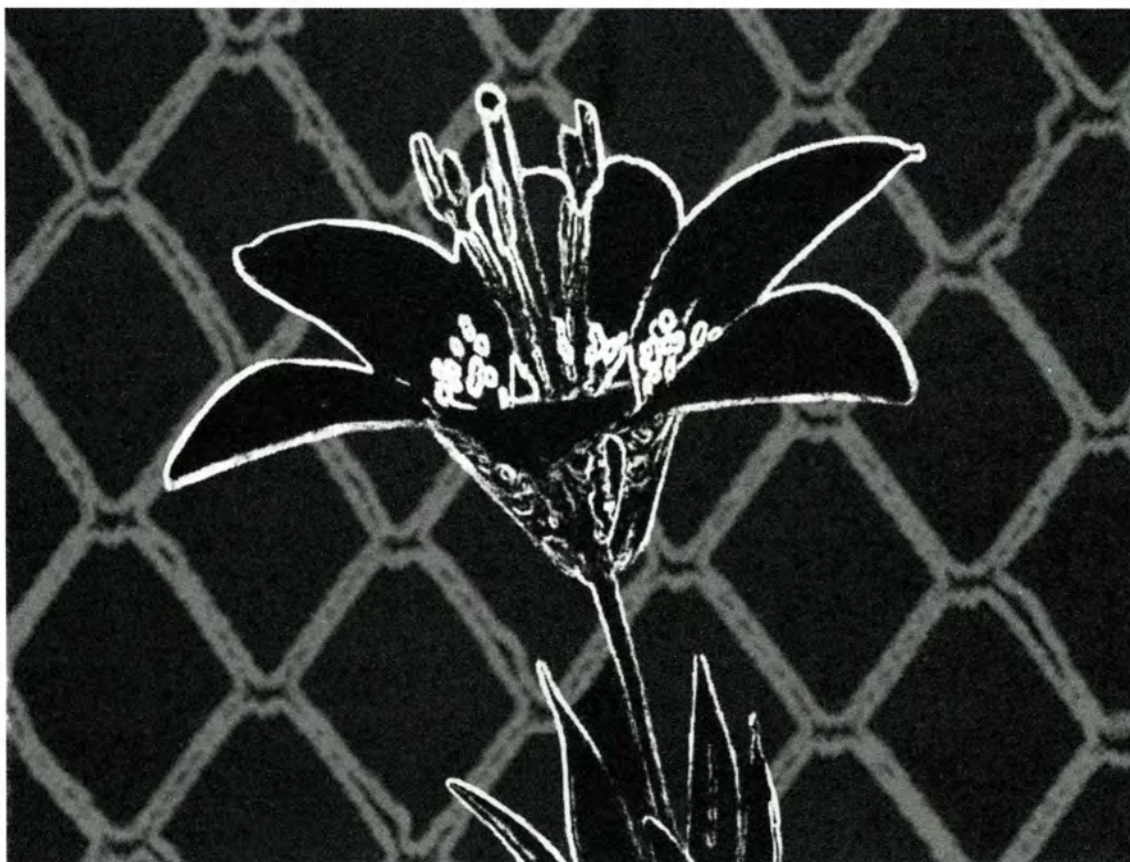
Biblical critique

So what should be the response of the Christian school community towards the environment both as a worldview and as a political movement? First of all, a study of a biblical model of creation in the Christian school communities can be very beneficial. It will help us to critique the worldviews of both Christian anti-environmentalists and those who adopt many of the philosophies of the environmental movement. While conservative thinkers often criticize those who embrace environmentalism as chasing after secular issues at the expense of biblical standards for behavior, Christian environmental activists, in turn, denounce anti-environmentalists for ignoring God's plan for creation as they unconsciously chase after economic and material gain.

A study of some of the rhetoric on both sides of the issue could be an excellent case study in an ethics or Bible class. Looking critically at the contrasting worldviews of McKibben and Burkett will allow students to see how even those within the evangelical community can hold such radically diverse opinions.

Eye-opening studies

In science classes, a study of some of the research surrounding issues such as global warming and ozone depletion would illustrate how the assumptions and attitudes of scientists influence their findings and recommendations. It would also open our eyes to how we all selectively exploit "research" and "facts" to further our political and so-



The above illustration, entitled "Born in a Technosphere" was done by Sarah Van Pelt, a fourth-year student with a major in art at Redeemer College, Ancaster, Ont. Sarah hails from St. Thomas, Ont. She writes: "The birth of the beautiful flower amidst something as hard and unforgiving as a fence is exciting." The fence was taken from a photograph of a concentration camp fence.

cial goals. Burkett, for example, has been accused of relying heavily on faulty scientific data to support his findings.

What is most important, studying environmentalism allows Christian schools to practice what they preach. Many Christian environmentalists point to the root of the environmental problem — a culture that has run away from the true God into the arms of the gods of consumerism, economism and materialism. The symptoms of the crisis are global warming, ozone depletion and species extinction. But at its very core, the problem is the same as in the days of Jeremiah: "I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and the rich produce. But you came and defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable" (Jeremiah 2:7).

The subject of the environment should

not be ignored or treated lightly by Christian schools. We must allow Christian school classrooms to be places where all of God's world can be explored without fear of controversy or condemnation. This is accomplished by guiding students to ask penetrating questions about the worldviews of those involved on both sides of the debate. What is most important, Christian educators must help their students evaluate and critique through the eyes of faith. By accomplishing these goals, the Christian school will help their students understand an important and intriguing topic.

Books to Read:

Larry Burkett, *Whatever Happened to the American Dream* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1937).

Calvin DeWitt, *The Environment and*

the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament? (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1991).

Ken Gnanaken, *God's World: A Biblical Theology of the Environment* (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1999)

Gale Heide, *This is My Father's World* (Fountain Valley, California: Joy Publishing Company, 1998).

Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Random House, 1989)

Bill McKibben, *Maybe One: A Case for Smaller Families* (New York: Random House, 1999).

Francis Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man: a Christian View of Ecology*. (Wheaton, Ill, Tyndale, 1970).

Stewardship in **The Lord of the Rings**

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

"But all worthy things that are in peril as the world now stands, those are my care. And for my part, I shall not wholly fail of my task, though Gondor should perish, if anything passes through this night that can still grow fair or bear fruit and flower again in days that come. For I also am a steward. Did you not know?"

With these words, the wizard Gandalf in J.R.R. Tolkien's epic *The Lord of the Rings* gave voice to Tolkien's own conviction that Western civilization is far, disastrously far, from a biblical understanding of the relationship between human beings and the rest of the creation. A devout Catholic, Tolkien took the doctrine of creation seriously. His well-known suspicion of modern technology earned him the scorn of many contemporaries, who accused him of being a Luddite.

The charge is unfair, although as Catholic reviewer Ken Craven notes, "he didn't like automobiles, trains, planes, or for that matter, any kind of machine that separated man from his work and life." Unlike the Luddites, who blamed the machines of the early industrial revolution for their troubles, Tolkien saw the machine as a symptom of brokenness, an artifact of the loss of the harmony that existed before the Fall.

Enemy of trees

In *The Lord of the Rings*, the forests are the home of the elves, who seem to be in many ways like humanity before the Fall. When Sauron raises his evil army, he not only devises great machines to produce weapons and armor, but he also sends the orcs to cut down the trees. His aim is to destroy the elves' domain, and, indeed, in the end they must either leave or perish. It is said of Sauron in volume 2, "He has a mind of metal and wheels; and he does not care for growing things, except as they serve him for the moment." In the new film version of the novel, the machines of Sauron are made to seem diabolical indeed, but

the cutting of the trees as yet has no larger context. If the films follow the pattern of the novels, Sauron's war against the trees should be more clear in the second installment.

For Sauron is at war, not only against men and elves and hobbits, but also against the trees themselves. In volume 2, Treebeard, a mossy ancient denizen of the forest, says, "He and his foul folk are making havoc now. Down on the borders they are felling trees — good trees. Some of the trees they just cut down and leave to rot — orc mischief that; but most are hewn up to feed the fires of Orthanc. There is always a smoke rising from Isengard these days.... Curse him root and branch; many of

those trees were my friends, creatures I had known from nut and acorn; many had voices of their own that are lost forever now. And there are wastes of stump and brambles where once there were singing groves. I have been idle. I have let things slip. It must stop!"

Heart of creation

What are we to make of sentient trees? Tolkien understood that the utilitarian philosophers were wrong; things do not derive their worth from their utility. The creation has intrinsic value because it is held in being by the Word of the Lord. There is more than metaphor to the biblical expression, "The heavens declare the glory of God, the vault of heaven proclaims his handiwork; day discourses of it to day, night to night hands on the knowledge."

The ecology implicit in *The Lord of the Rings* springs from a worldview saturated with a biblical understanding of the mystery of the creation.

An equally biblical, if far less poetic, view was taken by Dr. Francis Schaeffer in the early 1970s in *Pollution and the Death of Man*, a book that was greeted in most Christian circles with a deafening silence. When historian Lynn White in his infamous 1967 article in *Science* magazine blamed a Christian view of the material world for our environmental crises, he was not entirely wrong. Both Tolkien and Schaeffer, in their own ways, point us to a view that does not interpret "the crown of creation" to mean





Lowell Hagan
Column Editor
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“the only worthwhile thing in the creation.”

Biblical environmentalism

If in our Christian schools we treat ecology as just another hybrid (critics would say bastard) scientific discipline, we are falling into the trap of trying to solve the problems science has created by applying still more science. What is more, we are missing a golden opportunity for genuinely integrative learning. This is not a topic to be approached by having students read a few pages from Schaefer in a Bible class one year, then do a unit on ecology in science class the next year, and perhaps read *The Lord of the Rings* if they feel like it. They need to be confronted with the theological and philosophical issues involved.

If we genuinely believe that Christian faith is integral to learning, not an add-on extra, our students would be better served if they could study the history of the degradation of our own North American environment, examine the principles of Schaefer's biblical environmentalism, learn the current state of our scientific understanding of the interrelationships of life on earth, and discuss Tolkien's Christian poetic view of the state of the earth, all within the same time frame.

And why throw in Tolkien? Because poetry is the place where mystery meets concrete reality. God's intention for his creation is Shalom, a state of things being in the right relationships with one another. This is essentially an aesthetic balance, a harmony, not a chemical equation of a cost-benefit analysis or a logical syllogism. Without the kind of aesthetic awareness Tolkien brings to our understanding of the creation, our more logic-oriented disciplines will not be able to do their full work. Christian imagination is not a luxury or a frill or a specialization reserved for a talented few. It is as essential to a whole, integral understanding of environmental issues, or any other issue, as are the historical, scientific, economic and all other disciplinary perspectives.

Use the Internet

So the medium of film, namely interest in the film adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*, which will last for at least the two years it will take for the second and third episodes to be released, can spark a renewed discovery of the medium of fiction in print, which can contribute directly to an enhanced understanding of our more conventional educational media. And, as always, the medium of the Internet awaits as a resource.

At latest count, interest in *The Lord of the Rings* has spawned more than a quarter million web sites, most of which are of interest only to the people who created them, and most of the rest of which are concerned with the minutiae of the books and

the film. But there are other resources as well. At www.jesus.com.au/wicca/3.html we find an approach to modern-day paganism very similar to Paul's approach in his sermon on Mars Hill. Like the Athenians, who with their “unknown god” had something right but didn't know it, the Wiccans have something right too: creation *is* sacred. But they also have something terribly wrong: it is not *divine*.

At another website — limnology.wise.edu/peterson/ecoFiction/LordOfTheRings.html — there is a useful excerpt from Patrick Curry's book *Defending Middle Earth*. Traditionalist Catholic writer Dr. Ken Craven examines the theological underpinnings of Tolkien's work at www.geocities.com/athens/Ithaca/325/genlworld.html. And the on-line journal *Trumpeter*, espousing a philosophy of “deep ecology,” examines the ecological implications of Tolkien's novels from a non-Christian perspective. As usual, the search engine www.google.com is most likely to return the largest number of scholarly articles in response to a search such as “Tolkien ecology.”

We live at a time of unprecedented opportunity to bring together a wide variety of communications media in the classroom, from film to the Internet. This is one issue we might approach by taking advantage of that opportunity.

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Slouching Toward Bedlam

A Day No Paper Would Be Recycled

by Jan Kaarsvlam

Jan Kaarsvlam recently arrived at the Manhattan Christian School in Montana to begin his new job as lunchroom supervisor only to discover that they hadn't heard of him and weren't interested in hiring him. It turned out that, because of a rather remarkable clerical error, he had actually applied and been accepted at a school with a similar name in Madagascar. After contemplating and ultimately deciding against moving to the eastern African coast, he has instead decided to accept a position as manager of the new fine arts facility at Ripon Christian School in California.

Biff Knot approached the faculty room door with some trepidation. This was the first day of his student teaching assignment, and, only four years ago, he had walked as a high school student in hallways like this in his own school. Back then, the staff lounge had been off limits to the shy student he had been. Now he was supposed to walk boldly through it and find his supervising teacher, a man he had talked to several times on the phone but had never met. All he knew was the fellow's name, Sam Toomer, and the fact that he taught biology. Biff took a deep breath, then walked through the door.

Inside, the lounge was fairly quiet, with two or three clusters of teachers bent over their coffee, mentally preparing themselves for the day to come. One group consisted of someone in a ratty looking sweatsuit, another in a shop apron, and someone wearing a tie that was far too short for him. The guy in the ratty sweatsuit was picking his teeth. In another corner, a tall, skinny older fellow seemed involved in what sounded like an exciting conversation with an older grey-haired lady, and a younger guy with thick dark glasses. Biff wandered over and took a seat near them. The tall fellow smiled at him quickly, but seemed unwilling to interrupt the discussion. He was speaking.

"All I am saying is that we have to somehow get the kids

involved in something bigger. This little plant-a-tree stuff is good PR, but it is teaching the kids to buy into the idea that little bandaids are going to help a world that is severely diseased and severely injured."

The tall skinny fellow took a breath, and, in that moment, the younger guy with thick glasses jumped in. "I see your point, Sam, and I agree with you up to a point. But it is the little stuff

that is going to make the most difference in the long run. The daily recycling, the conservation of power, the planting of trees and gardens, those are all ways of taking care of God's world. I don't see what is so wrong with helping students to think in those terms. We must teach them to tend God's earth."

The skinny fellow, who Biff now thought of as Sam, and who, he suddenly realized, must be his supervising teacher, Sam Toomer, actually laughed at this. "Gerry, you are so gullible. I bet you've got toilet paper made from recycled paper at home too, huh?"

The guy with glasses (Gerry, Biff supposed) actually blushed. Sam continued. "Here is the problem. We Christians are so timid,

especially those of us in the Reformed faith. We've got all the answers, so why don't we act like it? We know God made the world. We know that humans are destroying it. But we are so interested in taking the middle of the road that we act in cowardly little ways. This is God's world the oil companies are digging up and selling. This is God's world we are strip mining and logging. This is God's world we are paving over. But do we shout about it? Do we demand action? No. We buy toilet paper made from recycled paper and feel good about ourselves."

The woman had been looking thoughtful throughout all this, but now chose to get involved. "I don't think we do have all the answers, though, Sam. You scientists are always complaining that those of us in the humanities are so unclear and wishy washy



about things, but, frankly, I think the science world could learn a little bit about precision from the rest of us. Half of you says the ozone hole is a problem; the other half says it isn't. Some of you say that the world is getting warmer; others say it isn't. Back in the 1970s, I remember hearing that we would run out of fuel by the year 2000. That didn't happen. How can you say with a straight face that you have all the answers?"

Sam responded immediately, with even more passion in his voice than before. "Actually, Carrie, when I was talking about having all the answers, I didn't mean science, I meant Christians. We are supposed to be Reformed. We are supposed to believe that our task on earth is to transform culture. Well, I don't know how we can transform anything by being too scared to raise our voices or say what we see."

Gerry cleared his throat. "I hear what you are saying, Sam, but can I ask what brings all this on? You've never been much of a fatalist before. In fact, I'd have to describe you as more of a raving idealist."

Sam sighed. "One of my students was supposed to come in early to take a test. He was 20 minutes late, after I came in especially early just for him. And then, when he finishes the test, he dumps all his old worksheets and notes in the garbage can. So I stop him. 'Do you really want to do that?' I ask. He just smiles. 'Aw, c'mon, Mr. Toomer,' he says. 'That was the last test of the semester. I ain't gonna need those notes anymore.' 'Maybe you *ain't gonna need those notes anymore*,' I answer, 'but what I meant was throwing them in the garbage can. Shouldn't you be recycling those?'"

Sam looked from face to face. When he saw Biff looking supportive, he gestured toward him excitedly. "I mean, the recycling bin is only two feet away from the garbage can, for crying out loud. But do you know what the kid says?" Sam's voice rose with excitement, and some of the other teachers in the lounge started to look his way. "This kid says, 'Aw, Mr. Toomer, my dad is in the garbage business, and he laughs all the time about people like you. People sort all their recycling at home and put it at the curb in special containers; then the truck picks it up, messes it all up, and dumps it in the landfill. Once in a while, some do-gooder like you runs out and asks Dad why they're mixing the recycling in with the garbage, and Dad just tells them real serious-like that that's standard — they'll sort it all out back in the yard. And these people always fall for it. Dad always says there's one born every minute.'"

There was dead silence. Sam dropped into his chair with a sigh, rested his chin in one hand, then added the clincher. "The boy's father is a member of our school board."

Biff sat silent, full of mixed feelings. He respected the passion

in his supervising teacher whom he had yet to meet officially. He also felt dumbfounded by the brazen disregard for the holiness of creation not only by a student but also by a school board member. Bedlam Christian was a strange place.

And it was about to get stranger. The guy in the ratty sweatsuit (whom Biff would later come to know as Rex Kane) crossed the room and slapped Sam on the shoulder. "Don't let it get you down, Sammy," Rex said. "You know, there's an old Hopi proverb that says, 'The Crow may lie when the sun is shining, but he still croaks at the moon.'"

A look of perplexity flashed across Biff's face. He might have noticed the same look on other faces (a common look in the lounge whenever Rex spoke), but Rex didn't give him time. Rex leaned closer to Sam and said, in a whisper loud enough for Biff, Gerry and Carrie to hear, "You know, you shouldn't bad-mouth school board members when one of the new ones is present." He nodded his head toward Biff. A look of panic crossed Sam's and Biff's faces simultaneously. This was not the way Biff wanted to meet his new supervising teacher, and he found himself tongue-tied.

"I got you!" Rex shouted with glee. "Oh, that was priceless, Sammy. You should have seen the look on your face!" As Rex laughed, Sam Toomer calmly stood up, pushed back his chair, and started toward the door. Rex didn't even notice as he slapped his thigh. "Hey, Gordy! You got to hear this!"

Wanting to follow Toomer, Biff jumped from his seat so quickly that the chair flipped over and clattered loudly to the floor behind him. Red-faced, he picked it up and ran after Toomer.



As he left the lounge, Biff turned all sorts of questions around in his mind. It occurred to him that when he had first crossed the threshold of the teachers' lounge earlier, he had crossed into more of a challenge than he had ever faced before. He was prepared for students who didn't care or hadn't done their homework. He knew 15 different classroom management strategies, 12 cooperative learning methods, five warning signs of depression in students, and six steps to discerning educational philosophies from a Christian perspective. He was prepared for some difficult days.

But how are you supposed to teach students about transforming the world when you run straight up against cynicism and shortsightedness, and people that give up and, well, sin? What do you do when your colleagues make light of the abuse of God's world? How do you teach kids to care for creation in a way that

doesn't seem naïve or spineless? Biff hoped that Sam Toomer would be able to help him sort it all out. But then, as he thought about it, the look of frustration on Sam's face as he stormed out made Biff wonder if there were any answers to his questions.

The bell rang, and all of these questions (along with his lingering confusion about Rex's Hopi proverb) faded away as Biff, instead, worried about how to find Sam Toomer's room and begin the day.

Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship

THE GIFT OF THE STRANGER: FAITH, HOSPITALITY AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Embodying **THE STORY** in Our Schools

What would our schools look like if we were not afraid?

by Elaine Brouwer

Elaine Brouwer is co-director of Alta Vista College in Seattle, Washington. For that organization, she conducts workshops for Christianschools, teaches undergraduate and graduate classes for teachers (through other degree-granting institutions) and serves as district coordinator of Northwest Christian Schools International.

"Purposing Christian Schools" is a back-to-the-basics or maybe forward-to-the-basics call! It is a plea for Christian educators to wrestle with the basic question of intent. What do we seek first for our schools? What vision moves us?

Although the question of purpose may not be far from our discussions, we have been much more prone to ask about content and structure. But even when we ask those questions, the answers usually fall in the tinkering category. Which leads me to wonder, Are we asking the wrong questions? Are we asking what is really worth teaching and learning? If we were seriously grappling with these types of questions, would our schools be the near carbon copies of the public systems that they now are?

We need to ask questions that push us back to foundational issues, issues prior to whether or not schools as we know them and organize them are even valid. These foundational issues are housed in at least two major questions: What story are we called to live? and, What story are we actually embodying in our schools? Asked differently: What do our students surmise about the purpose and character of the life they ought to live?

Honoring the Message

I would venture to say that everyone involved in Christian education confesses to finding answers to the purposing question in Scripture. This we have in common. However, going to Scripture does not guar-

Do Christian schools import self-aggrandizing, competitive, standardizing, deadening, fragmenting practises like a Trojan horse?

antee that we hear what it has to say. In our earnestness to gain insight and formulate answers, I believe that we often, inadvertently, obscure the message by treating it as a source of worldview answers or a systematic theology of education. The Scriptures do lead to answers to the worldview questions of Who am I? Where am I? and Why am I here? but this is not

their primary intent. Scripture is first of all one coherent, God-centered story that begins with Creation and ends with the fulfilment, a story that culminates and finds its purpose and center in the cross.

If we want our answers to the purposing question to really rest on Scripture, we have to recover the concept of THE STORY, the only true story, the story that gives pur-



pose and meaning to human lives on earth. However, carefully crafted, worldview systems, biblical or not, are rational systems of thought that may provide head answers to purposing questions, but they cannot claim the heart. THE STORY transforms. It reworks our most basic understanding of who we are and why we are here. THE STORY brings us to our knees in worship and adoration.

Contradictory clues

What if our schools were transparent, allowing THE STORY to shine through each and every aspect of the program? What would such schools look like? What kind of life would students experience within them and be encouraged and equipped to lead outside of them?

It is grossly unfair to expect students to formulate biblical answers when schooling practices model other answers, when they encourage individualism rather than community, competition rather than mutuality, consumption rather than stewardship. The occasional community service project, collaborative learning experience, or integral unit is a good thing to do, but when it is housed within practices that in general isolate, individualize and promote self serving, which message is stronger? How can we expect students to live within self-aggrandizing (honor roles), competitive (spelling bees), standardizing (one-size-fits-all standardized tests), deadening (recall and comprehension learning), fragmenting (discipline-centered courses, seven-period, bell-punctuated schedules) practices and come out prepared to follow the lead of a suffering God who laid down his life for the world he so loved.

Yes, I am persuaded that we do need to change our schooling structures and practices, perhaps drastically. But I am equally convinced that if we rush in too quickly with our matches or bulldozers we may

find that our new structures are little more than spiffed up versions of what we had to begin with. So where do we start?

The wrong question

We need to hear again THE STORY that begins with God opening his metaphorical mouth to call forth stars, rocks, plants and animals, pronouncing them good. "It is good," said God — before the appearance of the first human beings. However, the creation waited, as if in bud form, for someone to name it, to care for it, to develop it. For this task God created human beings, in his image.

The battle lines had been drawn long before the temptation in the garden. Human beings were the vehicle Satan used to wrest the creation from God. He knew that

...would our schools be the near carbon copies of the public systems they now are?

if he was successful in fomenting a rebellion — a schism between God and his people — the creation would follow. Satan addressed a fundamental question — Who are you? But he orchestrated the situation to point to a different answer: "Do you want to be like God?" Rather than rephrasing the question, man and woman were intrigued by the possibilities of a different answer. They accepted the terms of the new question, taking God's beloved world with them into the depths of despair and brokenness.

But God so loved his world that he entered human history and took upon himself all the suffering and pain resulting from that wrong answer in the garden. Not only

did he die and rise again, conquering the results of the wrong answer; he chose to live on earth for a time demonstrating what life lived according to his terms might look like.

It is in the times between the cross and Christ's coming again, times characterized by the now-but-not-yet paradox, that the early church lived and that we live. We are part of THE STORY. Like Christ's first followers, we are called to live out the reality of God's Kingdom on earth. We do not have to bring in the kingdom. That has already been done. We are to live as if it were really and already here!

Subverting God's story

The question of the purpose of Christian education is really a question of faithfulness. Are our institutions and the practices within them faithful to THE STORY? One of the traps we well-intentioned Christ-followers fall into is changing the God-centered STORY into a me-centered story. God so loved me. Christ died for me. Christ rose to give me victory. The Spirit guides and comforts me. One day I will reign in heaven with him. The story becomes a personal salvation narrative rather than a cosmos-wide redemption story initiated and accomplished by God, for the glory of God alone. Lest we think that our schools have escaped this trap, we should examine our devotions, chapels, prayers and Bible curriculums.

The push and pull of our consumer culture also subverts THE STORY. We have not been immune to the privatizing of spiritual and religious issues, leaving the public arena "free" of such cultic influences. Not only have we been affected by this culture — we have participated in such an unbiblical, unfaithful dualism. For many of us, the Christian STORY exists alongside the American story. We hardly notice this as long as the stories seem consistent.

But when they are in conflict, which one wins out? Do we counsel a student for the risky, thankless job of opposing a consumer-driven culture, or do we point them toward courses and career choices that will insure a comfortable, if not affluent, life style? We cannot have it both ways.

Are we serious about nurturing faithful, loving, stewarding disciples that lay claim to the whole of life because Christ has been given authority over every square inch of life — with all the risks, challenges, heartaches and joys that this kind of life encompasses?

A new paradigm

The God-centered STORY should inspire us as educators to ask people-centered questions. What is really happening to and with the people in our schools? Lives lived in the shadow of the cross are characterized by compassion, mutuality, integrity, peace, reflection, purposeful action. Can this kind of life be lived, modeled, pointed to by schools that cycle 100 – 120 students a day through five to seven different classrooms with only 40 minutes of “contact time” each? Structures and practices that get in the way of relationships need to change. Purposing Christian secondary education requires that we focus on learners and what kind of experiences can empower them to boldly live the reality of the Kingdom come — without a script! Debates over direct instruction, tougher standards, standardized tests, bells or no bells, seven-period days versus block scheduling, back to the basics or problem-based learning — all these subvert the process of addressing this much more basic issue. What if we devoted our energies and imaginations to flesh out answers to this question and then, and only then, ask about structures and procedures?

We need a new paradigm for secondary education. We need to imagine an alterna-

tive. We need to craft other ways to encourage and equip the young to take their place in THE STORY, in their time and place with their unique array of gifts and talents. We need to shake off the shackles

Structures and practices that get in the way of relationships need to change.

of the “way we have always done it.”

This new paradigm would locate THE STORY at the center of everything we do, shaping curriculum choices, teaching and learning activities, and the structures that house them. The new paradigm would be characterized by integration, not fragmentation. It would encourage a positive, life-wide worldview rather than an issue-oriented, reactionary rational system. It would focus on the people and relationships within the educational enterprise, asking what it would take for each to flourish. The new paradigm would take seriously the call to be agents of healing, reconciliation, and redemption in a broken world loved and redeemed by God.

Triumphalism or utopia building has no place in this new paradigm. Humility is the only response to the suffering God. Humility and God-modeled love rejects any totalitarian, violence-producing worldview that builds its empire on the backs of those who are different. At the heart of this new paradigm would be the impetus to strive for excellence — not to get ahead but excellence that offers itself to the world — my life for yours, to create pockets of shalom, to exercise justice, peace, compassion.

Bold leaders

What type of leadership could encourage us to dream new dreams for education?

The leadership question is like the school question. We need to avoid asking the wrong questions, beginning in the wrong place. The leadership question is not first of all a personnel question. It is a “Where should we be going?” question. The leaders we need are those who can articulate STORY-based visions that encourage us to see differently, those who can craft and carry out practices integral to the vision and who insure that practices and structures serve the people within them. They are people who raise the uncomfortable questions about vision and practice. We need a community equipped and willing to lead, each person in his or her own area of giftedness. We need gardeners of the vision, not managers of schools.

Vision is not the province of the gifted few. Visions are birthed when people wrestle with the gap between the practiced and the desired, when they ask different types of questions, truly seeking greater insight and wisdom.

“What would our schools look like if we were not afraid?” What are we afraid of? Are we afraid that we can’t imagine an alternative and that our roles may change or our jobs become obsolete? Are we afraid that if we are true to THE STORY we may end up in conflict with governments, accrediting agents, our churches? Are we afraid that no one will come, or that we might fail? We are not called to be successful. We are called to be faithful. We are called to follow the spirit into the mystery and paradox that is life lived in Christ.

“What would our schools look like if we cared enough?”

Do Christian schools surrender all?

Clarence Joldersma (cjolders@calvin.edu) assistant professor of education at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich., asked the Dot Edu panel whether Christian schools should be counter-cultural. This question quickly led to another question — whether or not Christian schools are distinctive enough to be considered counter-cultural. Let's see how our panel handles this potato.

The panel consists of:

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

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

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

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

Tony Kamphuis (TonyKamp@aol.com), teacher of history and business at Smithville District Christian High School, Smithville, Ontario

October 9, 2001

Clarence, instead of asking, "Should Christian Schools be counter-cultural?" I'd like to posit that Christian Schools *will* be counter-cultural by their very nature.

Following Christ in education means looking at the world through biblical glasses: My life as a teacher and student is not my own; my goal is to glorify my Creator in all I think or do; my purpose is not to amass treasures on earth, to have a great career, to be famous, or to use others around me so that I can succeed, but to pour out my life for God. I surrender all to Christ; I lose my life so I can gain it; I expend my energies in service to others.

As a teacher I would daily challenge mainstream culture: I would focus on giving my students a right view of God — his



Johanna Campbell

claims on their life, his care for them and his sovereignty over the nations. I would try to instill in my pupils a desire to serve their neighbor in whatever way possible, since in so doing they serve Christ. I would ask my students to honor creation in all its facets, for created reality reflects the hand of its Designer. By God's grace I would model a trust in God that casts out all fear, so that in this post-modern age, I can take risks for God that would fill my non-Christian friends with trepidation.

My goals in life *will* be radically different from mainstream culture and my classroom would reflect that daily.

Johanna Campbell

October 11, 2001

I couldn't agree more with you, Johanna. By definition, a Christian school *should* be counter-cultural as you suggest. But when I take a hard and critical look at what we *are* (as schools and communities), I worry that we have lost that distinctiveness.

All of us "older" types remember learning about the "antithesis" in school, or catechism (remember that?) It meant — if I rightly remember those lessons — that we as Christians lived in some tension with the world around us because our perspectives, values, and purpose were in such stark contrast with those of "the world."

I also remember being taught that we were to be "in the world but not of the world." I sensed that difference and that tension much more when I was a boy than I do today. Much of that tension, that uneasiness, that antithesis with the world is gone. I suppose it could be because as Christians we have had a powerful, shaping influence on our culture. Or is it that we have accommodated ourselves quite comfortably and unfortunately to the standards of our culture?

In spite of the fact that our young people are more expressive about their faith than ever before, they also have a stronger desire to be "just like everybody else" than ever before. In their dress, their leisure pursuits, their consumerism, their language, their attitudes and more, they reflect their culture much more than they bump up against it. So, if we hope to educate counter-culturally, we have much to do.

Tim Hoeksema



Tim Hoeksema

October 12, 2001

Tim and Joanna, I read recently that Christian schools could be considered special education — preparing for life by offering



Clarence
Joldersma

a special curriculum and special learning experiences. However, we are also “parent-run” schools. Does anyone know what that really means? It may have to do with finances; it may have to do with curriculum and mission.

Among our parents, there is a continuum of preferences about how Reformed Christians view school and culture, don’t you think?

On one end, there is an expectation that school provides a curriculum that balances discernment and responsibility with learning about God’s creation. On the other, there is the hope that school will develop a mission that allows (encourages) students to become agents of renewal who will transform North-American culture.

So the question may be: should Christian schools have as their mission that all students will engage in learning experiences that will challenge our mainstream culture?

Lois Brink



Lois Brink

students sort out the many important issues facing the western world today.

Will we just support whatever the western leaders promote or will we help our students see that the responsibility for peace is a two-way street?

Pam Adams

October 17, 2001

Pam, I think you have it right when you remind us to address these cultural issues by challenging students to live out their ideals, their vision of creation order or, as the good ole phrase says, as agents of renewal. Besides banging away at culture’s sins, can we address the restoration of our culture by blending awareness of the biblical perspective and the virtues? You mention some: compassion, justice, peace seeking, service giving. Do we too often emphasize the fallenness of creation with our students? Do we leave them too often with discernment of sinfulness but no opportunities to restore or transform culture? If we are special education schools, can this “specialness” be in our vision of renewal?

Lois Brink

October 14, 2001

Lois makes an important point. Parents have different expectations when it comes to Christian education. Some want an excellent education that is based on moral principles, while others are less concerned with excellence and more concerned that their children catch and act on the radical message of the gospel.

Tim points out that while today’s students are concerned with personal expressions of faith, they are quick to conform in other ways.

One thing I think we need to keep in mind is that today’s students are indeed different because the times are different. I certainly qualify as one of the older types Tim speaks of. The 60s were indeed very different times. I am wondering if the events of September 11 will, like the Viet Nam War, cause our students to become more concerned with political and global issues.

Today’s students have visited more foreign countries than we ever did. Service projects and exchange programs have given them exposure to people the world over. I hope and pray that they will be less inclined than past generations were to see other cultures as being less valuable than their own.

While they are very much influenced by consumerism, they have met and seen with their own eyes the suffering of others. I hope our Christian schools will take seriously the call to help



Pam Adams

November 13, 2001

Who is subversive here? It’s easy in this mixed up, sin-darkened world to forget who is on the side of original good and who it was that tried to subvert this perfect state. That makes a difference because it frees us from the need to try and be “distinctive” on every issue. Instead we are called to be obedient!

God has graciously constrained the effects of sin so that at times others, despite themselves, I guess, do “good” as well. When that happens, we don’t have to fret and worry that we aren’t “distinctive.” We just have to be sure we’re trying our best to be obedient.

If God calls us to care for our bodies and if, in response, we develop a series of excellent athletics activities, we don’t need to be concerned that the public school down the road has a program that looks remarkably similar. We can be glad of that. After all, the line of the antithesis doesn’t just run between groups of people, but also through the hearts of us all.

In that context, I’m not so sure about parent-run schools. We may be mistaken when we (over?) emphasize the role of the parents in the direction of our schools. Certainly the family and the school should share similar goals, but the school as a social institution is given certain responsibilities directly by God and



Tony Kamphuis

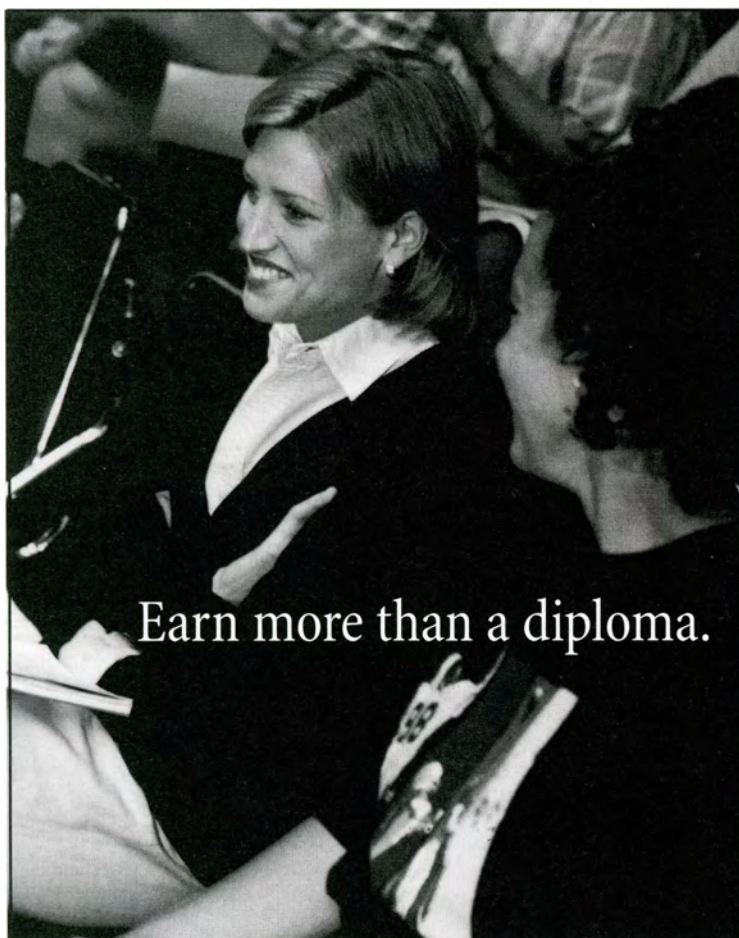
has to answer to him first. Those given responsibility in our system of education shouldn't be excessively tied to trying to fulfill the will of the parents. We all know of times when parents weren't exactly planning to lead the school in the right direction! I hope we are all able to see how these two "spheres" can work together, but to call our schools "parent-run" can rob them of their responsibilities and rights as agents in God's Kingdom.

As a result, in general, there are two different ways to try to take care of sin and its effects in God's good garden. One is to try and pluck out every possible thing that isn't purely good, and then hope to establish a bumper crop of goodness (the focus on the fallenness that surrounds us as mentioned above (by Lois, I think) or to proceed to plant as many good plants as possible and

thereby to "squeeze out" the places available for sin and its effects. I heard a minister call that the "Eureka" principle.

Darkness can't exist where there is light, and so we go about our lives, and we encourage our student fellow-travelers to do likewise, being agents of light in our relations with God, our fellow humans and the creation. We focus on being obedient rather than distinctive, oriented towards the positive possibilities rather than the negative dangers, and becoming enabled to live "the abundant life" that Christ has reserved for us!

Tony Kamphuis



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REPAIRING THE RUINS

Thoughts on Christian Higher Education

by Donald T. Williams

Dr. Donald T. Williams is Pastor of Trinity Fellowship (E.F.C.A.) and Associate Professor of English at Toccoa Falls College in the foothills of the NE Georgia mountains.

In the evening I return to my house and go into my study. At the door I take off the clothes I have worn all day, mud-spotted and dirty, and put on regal and courtly garments. Thus appropriately clothed, I enter into the ancient courts of ancient men, where, being lovingly received, I feed on that food which alone is mine, and which I was born for; for I am not ashamed to speak with them and to ask the reasons for their actions, and they courteously answer me.

Niccolo Machiavelli ¹

There has never been a great revelation of the word of God unless He has first prepared the way by the rise and prosperity of languages and letters, as though they were John the Baptists.

Martin Luther ²

The end, then, of learning, is to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love Him, to imitate Him, to be like Him, as we may the nearest by possessing our souls of true virtue, which, being united to the heavenly grace of faith, makes up true perfection.

John Milton ³

And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.

Jesus of Nazareth ⁴

On these four pillars set as cornerstones — the Renaissance Scholar, the Protestant Reformer, the Christian Poet, and, su-

premely, the Lord of Glory — we may build as on a firm foundation our Christian philosophy of education.

The classical concept of education which inspired men of the Renaissance like Machiavelli involved growing out of the



Drawing of Erasmus by Albrecht Durer

provincialism of one's own time and place to become a citizen of the ages. They heard around them the echoes of a great Conversation as old as the race, in which the great Minds wrestled with the great Questions: Who are we? Why are we here? What is ultimately real? What is the Good, the True, the Beautiful? How do we know? They strove to acquire the intellectual equipment — languages, logic, hermeneutics, for example — which would enable them to enter into that Conversation themselves, to benefit from the wisdom of the ancients, and perhaps even to make a small contribution of their own for the use of future generations. It was in books that the Conversation took place, and in their own books it would continue when they themselves had faded into dust.

The Christian vision of education is both broader and deeper than that of the ancients. It is more, but not less; it includes the classical ideal while going beyond it. We too seek to join a great Conversation already going on around us. It contains many of the same voices and deals with all of the same questions. But our Conversation is guided by the Voice of Scripture more surely toward the Truth, and it has as its goal not just our own personal enrichment and fulfillment but the glory of God in practical service.

To the classics

Therefore, the greatest service a Christian college can perform is to introduce its students to the Participants in the Conversation so that their lives can be enriched and their service informed by it. It is, in other words, to make them lovers of books: the Bible supremely, the classics, of course, and a host of heroes of the Faith who have blazed the trail before us. ⁵

Both Calvin and Luther recognized the debt that the Reformation — the recovery of the Gospel in its purity — owed to learning. For it was Renaissance Humanist scholars like Colet, Valla, and Erasmus with their battle cry of *ad fontes*, "back to the sources," who had not only recovered the original text of Scripture but pioneered the grammatico-historical exegesis that allowed its Voice to be heard clearly once again. ⁶ A providential confluence of dates captures the relationship: in 1516, Erasmus the Humanist scholar published the first printed edition of the Greek New Testament, and in 1517, Martin Luther the Protestant Reformer nailed the Ninety-Five Theses to the Wittenberg church door. As a contemporary proverb said, "Erasmus laid the egg, and Luther hatched it."

If we wish to preserve, defend, transmit, and intelligently apply the Gospel the Reformation recovered, we would do well to

recapture the educational emphases that made that recovery possible.

For, as Luther knew, to acquire as much skill as possible in the languages and literature not only of the New Testament itself but also of the Greco-Roman world from which it sprang, is to attune our ears to the message of those John the Baptists who can help to point us to Christ. The proliferation of technical competencies required for entry to the modern marketplace makes it impossible to reproduce literally the classical education of the past. But Evangelical Christians should recognize that their descent from both the Apostles and the Reformers gives them a special motivation for keeping all those classical voices as part of the Conversation heard by the next generation.

Full humanity

Listening to those voices, then, we seek to train whole people for whole lives that give glory to God in every arena of life. We must understand, as Milton reminds us, that they were made in His image, have fallen from it, and are being restored to it by His Grace. As children of the King of Heaven, the whole universe is their back yard. Therefore, they alone have the right to make truthfully the claim of the pagan Terence: "*Homo sum; humani nil a me alienum puto*" ("I am a man; nothing human do I consider alien to me").

Hence, before we educate ministers, missionaries, workers for business, or teachers, we educate men and women. Professional competence to pursue their calling they must have, but much more: As Milton also reminds us, "I call, therefore, a complete and generous education, that which fits a man to perform justly, skillfully, and magnanimously all the offices, both public and private, of peace and war."⁷

The Bible, the Liberal Arts, and Professional Skill thus form for Christian educa-

tors, in a way that is impossible in the secular academy, a unified and coherent whole which they should understand and articulate as such.

One Truth

The content of education for Christians is a whole based on the unity of the Truth which flows from the one God, whether revealed in Scripture, in Nature, or in History. With Scripture as the authoritative key and guide, Christian education introduces students to the ongoing quest for that Truth in its fullness, wherever it is found. As Milton explained again:

"Truth indeed came once into the world with her divine Master, and was a perfect shape most glorious to look on: but when He ascended, and His Apostles after Him were laid asleep, then straight arose a wicked race of deceivers, who ... took the virgin Truth and hewed her lovely form into a thousand pieces, and scattered them to the four winds. From that time ever since, the sad friends of Truth, such as durst appear, imitating the careful search that Isis made for the mangled body of Osiris, went up and down gathering up limb by limb still as they could find them. We have not yet found them all, . . . nor ever shall do, till her Master's second coming; he shall bring together every joint and member, and shall mold them into an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection."⁸

Even the limited, partial, and fragmentary glimpses we have now through a glass darkly can inform, inspire, transform and liberate, helping us serve the Lord of Truth with the intelligent zeal He deserves.

No fear

As servants of the Lord of Truth and Light, Christian educators will strive to model and teach wholesome values and ideas. But they do not do this by burying their heads in the sand, nor by encourag-

ing their students to do the same. As servants of the Lord of Truth, they are afraid of nothing.⁹ They also agree with Milton that they "cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat."¹⁰

The primary reason their students should want to attend a Christian college is not negative but positive; not to escape the evil influence of the secular academy but because the Christian college is the West Point for Christian soldiers, preparing them to make an impact on the front lines of the spiritual and cultural wars that rage around us. There they learn to say, "Apollyon, beware what you do; for I am in the King's highway, the way of holiness; therefore take heed to yourself."¹¹

When Jesus said that the Truth would make us free, his primary reference was no doubt soteriological. But if God's purpose in salvation is to restore us to the fullness of our intended status as sub-regents of creation made in His image, then our Lord's dictum has pedagogical relevance as well. Truth seen as a Christ-centered whole frees us to become what we were created to be. Learn to "see God in everything," said John Donne, "and thou needst not then take off thine eye from ... anything."¹² It is just that theo-centric vision that Christian educators have the privilege of imparting as the basis of a life that can test the limits of our potential to glorify our Father in the marketplace of commerce, the marketplace of ideas — indeed, truly, in all the arenas of life.

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1. Niccolo Machiavelli, Letter to Francesco Vittori, 10 December 1513, trans. Alan H. Gilbert. Qtd. From Maynard Mack, et. Al., eds., *The Norton Anthology of World Mas-*

terpieces, 5th Continental ed., (NY: Norton, 1987), p. 1061.

2. Martin Luther, Letter to Eoban Hess, 29 March 1523; qtd. From Wallace K. Ferguson, *The Renaissance in Historical Thought: Five Centuries of Interpretation* (NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), p. 54.

3. John Milton, "Of Education," 1644, in Alexander M. Witherspoon and Frank J. Warnke, eds., *Seventeenth-Century Prose and Poetry*, 2n ed. (NY: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1982), p. 389.

4. John 8:32.

5. For, as Milton said, "Books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul whole progeny they are; nay, they do preserve, as in a vial, the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them." In "Areopagitica," 1644, in Witherspoon & Warnke, op. cit., p. 397.

6. For a fuller treatment of these issues, see Donald T. Williams, *Inklings of Reality: Essays toward a Christian Philosophy of Letters* (Toccoa Falls, Ga.: Toccoa Falls College Press, 1996), esp. ch. 3.

7. Milton, "On Education," op. cit., p. 390.

8. John Milton, "Areopagitica," op. cit., p. 411.

9. "Though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously ... to misdoubt her strength. Let her and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter?" Milton, "Areopagitica," p. 415.

10. "Areopagitica," p. 402.

11. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, in Witherspoon & Warnke, op. cit., p. 515.

12. John Donne, "Sermon XXIII," 1640, in Witherspoon & Warnke, op. cit., p. 79.

The Roots of Anti-intellectualism

Commentary, 1 Cor. 1:26 Sonnets LXXVIII-LXXIX

When I was a young and foolish boy
I thought intelligence a gift so rare
That all those who were blessed with it would share
The hunger of the mind for thought, the joy
Of battle on the windy plains of Troy,
The Big Bang, quarks the search for what is there,
The Saint's hope, the Post-Modernist's despair,
Of Hopkins call: Have, get before it cloy!

The Church especially would love to trace
The Father's hand in all he had created.
It seems that I had underestimated
How far we've let the Enemy deface
In us the image of the One who made
In us the very minds we have betrayed.

A short attention span will pad the purse
Of publishers who ought to be devoted
To seeing Truth pursued and then promoted.
They take the easy way. And, what is worse,
We justify our treason with a verse:
Not many wise, we've quoted and we've quoted;
According to the flesh, we've barely noted.
Thus blithely we perpetuate the Curse.

Willing to know the Evil as the Good,
We bypassed the Instructions on the Tree.
Not eating from it would have been the key
To all its fruit, if we had only stood.
We plucked it green, and greedily we ate;
Now, gorged with garbage, we push back the plate.

Donald T. Williams



Nancy Knol
Column Editor
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What Teachers Are Up Against

Ask any veteran teacher and he or she will probably tell you that teaching is harder today than it was, say, 10 years ago. I spoke with a recently retired teacher who said that one of the reasons she retired a few years earlier than she had anticipated was that she was discouraged. She found her students to be much less responsive than they used to be. "I wavered between being convinced that I was 'losing my touch' and believing that kids just weren't as tuned in to education," she explained.

There are many factors in today's culture that I think we should consider as we struggle with being effective teachers, but, for the sake of time and space, I would like to suggest three.

The first factor is time. In most families now, both parents work. This restricts their ability not only to get involved with their children's extra-curricular activities but also to make sure that their children are keeping up with school work. Other obligations, many of them very compelling, may take precedence over the daily needs of keeping a child on track. I especially grieve for attention-deficit students in this regard. They really need someone beyond school to help them organize and focus.

The second factor is closely related to the first. **Family structure has changed** remarkably in the last 10 or more years. As a child, I can remember that it was unusual (and uncomfortable) to discover that one of my classmates had only one parent at home. Recent statistics indicate that over 50 percent of our students now come from homes where a divorce has occurred. It is not my intention to either come to conclusions or make judgments as to why this is happening at a much more frequent rate — it is simply a fact that often enters into a student's ability to focus on school. There are more personal, pressing issues at stake for that student.

Most teachers, if they are honest, will also agree that there is **an increase in the use of alcohol and drugs** in the lives of our students. There certainly is a noticeable increase in the use of marijuana. I recently read a painfully informative book written by a clinical social worker named Joanne Baum. Her book is entitled *The Truth About Pot*. Here are just a few of the more alarming facts that she offers in regard to middle school students: In the mid-'90s, *The Weekly Reader* reported that a study conducted with fourth- through sixth-graders discovered that 26 percent of the students polled said they had friends who were using pot on a weekly basis. Over 50 percent of all marijuana users said they started using pot between sixth and ninth grade. Today's domestic marijuana is over 200 times as strong as what people smoked in the late '70s. Some of it has been grown in mercury-rich soil, and a new type is being laced with formalde-

hyde. In young adolescents particularly, whose developmental process is incomplete, marijuana causes strong memory loss, insomnia, lack of self-control, anxiety, drowsiness, irritability, and depression.

Life is hard

I do not offer these observations and statistics as a platform for discouraging people in the honorable profession of teaching. It just seems to me that we have to be alert to what we are up against. The simple truth is that life is hard for our students. Some of that may be due to choices that they have made, and some may be the result of issues beyond their control. As teachers, we need to be aware and sensitive in ways we may not have considered before.

Middle school has generally been viewed as a transitional place between childhood and pre-adulthood. Adolescence is generally (but not always) in full bloom, and yet most middle-schoolers still feel that an adult could be someone who might be approachable when it comes to problems beyond academics. This trust in adults decreases significantly for high school students. Teaching the three Rs still stands before us teachers as the main task to be accomplished, but to make them accessible we, with a growing number of students in our school population, have to wade through the three Ds: distance, division and dependence.

We must come to our students with creative lesson plans and high standards, but we must also come to them with a clear view of all the clutter that we may have to help clear away before they even care to listen.

Needed: Epic Episodes

Do you have an interesting anecdote to share with your fellow teachers? Write it out and send it to us. If you wish, you may first give us a bare-bone outline of what happened, and we will let you know if we're interested in publishing it or what improvements can be made.

Don't let the heading word "epic" scare you off. Your story does not have to be earthshaking to be useful or of interest to others.

Send to editor at the following e-mail address: bert-witvoet@sympatico.ca

A Spirit of Cooperation Versus Competition

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 think you know the answer. Please send your question to Tena Siebenga-Valstar, 168 Windsor Dr., Fort McMurray, Alta., T9H 4R2 or e-mail her at valstar@telusplanet.net

Resistance from parents

Question #1

Although I want to foster a spirit of cooperation in my classroom, I sometimes sense resistance from some parents who want their child to be “at the top of the class” academically. Can you give me some help with this?

Response:

This is the competition versus cooperation issue prevalent in many of our schools. We want our students to do their best. That is commendable because we are to use our gifts in ways that please God, responding to him in service and thankfulness. Our sinful nature, however, chooses to strive for the betterment of the self at the expense of our neighbor. Philippians 2 addresses this when we are encouraged to “do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.” James 3:13-16 speaks of selfish ambition as earthly, unspiritual and of the devil and concludes that “where there is envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.”

We are to put on the mind of Christ (Phil. 2). Jesus is our supreme example demonstrating love. He did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself taking the form of a slave, and eventually died on the cross for us. Romans 12 warns us not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought, and reminds us that each one of us has differing gifts and that these gifts are graciously given to us by God.

Living in community, as we do in the classroom, involves an honest recognition of our own gifts and of those of each member of the class. It means following the great commandment, which is to love God above all and our neighbor as ourselves. Students helping one another and learning from one another is an expression of that love.

There may be those who think that Paul believed in competition because he speaks of running the race. But when Paul likens

the Christian life to running a race, he does so in running to win the prize. Rather than winning the prize of a perishable wreath, as in the Isthmian games, Paul encourages us to win the crown of righteousness, life, or glory which has eternal significance. When we encourage our students to daily act out of love as they acknowledge their own gifts and those of others, we make an impact for the present and for eternity.

Those nasty putdowns

Question #2

What would you suggest to bring healing to a situation where class community has broken down because of negative attitudes, putdowns and sexual innuendoes?

Response:

Although your question does not indicate from whom these attitudes, putdowns and sexual innuendoes are coming, I will answer this as if they are coming from the students. Since all three are present, I suspect that this has been going on for some time and that this is a pattern which will have to be broken by firm and consistent action.

Initially you will have to acknowledge that it is happening. Use specific examples which you have heard or of which you are aware (not naming the source), and label each as a negative attitude, a putdown or a sexual innuendo.

I suggest you start by focusing on one of the negative actions, rather than all three. The most straightforward one with which to start is the putdown. Indicate that by using putdowns one is not honoring a fellow human being, someone made in the image of God who is deserving of respect and a temple of the Holy Spirit. Use biblical references if necessary. Once it is determined that putdowns are contrary to establishing community in a Christian classroom, decide what action will be taken should a putdown be used. A warning and later action to be taken can be established between teacher and students. When you hear the first occurrence, name it and take the necessary action. You may just have to say, “Was that a putdown?” and the students will begin to realize how prevalent their behavior has become without realizing it. I have seen a classroom make a dramatic turnaround by using this procedure.

Judging by the results of the putdown procedure, you may or may not have to follow through with a similar procedure for the negative attitude and sexual innuendoes. These may not be as pervasive, and you may be able to deal with individual students



Tena Siebinga-Valstar
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as the action occurs. In that case you may be able to make an individual contract with the student, whereby you and the student can determine the action to be taken should the behavior continue.

No desire for curriculum goals

Question #3

In our school the administration is in charge of curriculum review. Our school has always worked on curriculum through a school-based curriculum design model. This has always gone quite well, but with resistance on the part of the staff. Staff is at various levels of wanting to be involved. Many are just too busy to be interested or excited. Others have no desire to establish curriculum statements and goals. Some are frustrated when there is no direction, and others are frustrated when given direction.

Response:

Your scenario sounds very much like a typical classroom. Have you ever taught a class where everyone is eager and excited about learning? Yes, I know there are times when this happens, and I trust that the same is true when staff work together on a curriculum project.

The administrator or the administration team has the responsibility to maintain the vision of the school. In doing so they must also ensure that the curriculum taught in the school is consistent with the vision of the school. This is a daunting responsibility. As Christians we can so easily borrow materials and ideas from curriculum sources without evaluating them to determine their ultimate purpose. Many secular materials focus on human-kind or economic growth. We are called to give praise and honor to God. Some Christian sources may also be inconsistent with the school's vision and therefore need to be examined. The administration is responsible to ensure that teachers have a year-long plan whereby their students will meet the school's objectives for learning. There can be a variety of ways to achieve this.

It is important to remember that teachers, just like students, have their own learning styles. That means administrators may have to be flexible in allowing teachers to work out their curriculum goals or objectives in ways that work for them. Some may choose graphic presentation, while others may use a chart and still others may use the written word. A key point is that teachers must be able to communicate how their curriculum is consistent with the school's vision.

In recent years research indicates that teachers are able to determine the guiding principles which direct their teaching from

the stories their colleagues tell or write. We may have to focus on what teachers are already doing "right" and celebrate that, rather than focusing on their inadequacies. When a principal notices an exemplary unit or method of teaching, the teacher using it could be invited to share it with the staff. Staff members learn from one another when a spirit of trust and a sense of a learning community has been established.

It is also important to communicate individually with teachers to determine their capability of working on curriculum projects in addition to their classroom teaching. Just as in a classroom of students, each teacher has his or her individual circumstances. These need to be considered. A negative attitude which may affect others has to be dealt with in love, just as a teacher would do with a student who displays a less than cooperative attitude in the classroom. We must always be mindful of the task that God has called us to. It is an awesome task "to work out [our] salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in [us], enabling [us] to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12,13).



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Readers' Response

Needed the laugh! Thanks!

I've been far too serious today, and it wasn't until just now, while I was eating my lunch and the April CEJ issue, that I realized this. When a person actually laughs for the first time all day and realizes how good it feels, one has got to thank the people responsible for giving one an attitude adjustment.



So, with my feet kicked up on the desk, eating my lunch, I continued reading what is becoming one of my favorite authors in CEJ, Jan Kaarsvlam and his "Slouching Toward Bedlam" article. I actually belly-laughed three or four different times. Of course, I just cracked up when I read in the opening paragraph

that our poor Jan lost his job taking students on a storm sewer system field trip. Oh! Wouldn't that be the day! Ha! Ha!

But now, on a more serious note, I REALLY enjoy your magazine. As a music teacher, I found the April issue fantastic. I admit to being a bit nervous before reading it, concerned that it would be a candied "Gee isn't music great!" kind of issue. But I need not have worried. It was honest, thoughtful and inspiring. Marguerite Witvoet's article was excellent and practical for vocal techniques. I also really enjoyed Mary Lagerwey's "Turning all of Life into a Song." I am considering showing that article to my middle school students, for it truly summarizes what musicians are trying to do and what Christianity asks of us.

And, finally, Mr. Witvoet, I had to smile when I read your German quote in your April editorial ["Wo man singt, da lass dich nieder, böse menschen haben keine lieder"]. My husband (also a choral director) has had that quote typed and hanging in his classroom for a couple years. Thanks for your continued work on this magazine. It is always spicy and delightful to know that people are willing to express opinions.

Leah E. Bouwman

Byron Center, Michigan

P.S. I also appreciated the "Ten Commandments for a Good Vacation" from Cardinal Danneels.

A Matter of Equal Status?

I write with some concern regarding the article "Teaching the Golden Rules" by Joel Beversluis in Volume 41 (December 2001 issue). Our school currently subscribes to the journal for all of our senior staff and has over the years benefited from many of the articles that have been written. The journal article regarding the Golden rule and the corresponding advertisement on the back page made me feel very uncomfortable to the point of needing to write to you as editor of the Journal.

The article, while alluding to the inspired nature of the "golden rule," seems to give equal status to the other "sacred writings" and other humanistic writings from around the world. In my opinion this is totally unacceptable. It implies equality of the other writings with the Bible and has strong pantheistic overtones. To recognize that some writings are similar to parts of Scripture is not the concern; to elevate human writing to the same level as divinely inspired Scripture is. A view that humans are God's image-bearers and, as such, will act in ways that reflect this, is a more reasonable approach to the issue.

Certainly the advertisement on the back page seemed to under-

line the pantheistic view that is implied in the article. Would I use this chart? Yes! But only to show the dangerous nature of the attractive and ecumenical "all roads lead to Rome" approach that this article seems to promote.

Bill Rusin

Deputy Principal

**Tyndale Parent Controlled Christian School,
Sydney, Australia.**

No equality among religions

I was very disturbed when I saw the back cover of the December 2001 issue of the *Christian Educators Journal*. I was even more upset when I read the article by Joel Beversluis, "teaching the Golden Rules."

I teach at a Christian school to show that Christ is the centre of life. While world religions may certainly be discussed, and persecution and caricatures of other religions denounced, by no means do I view Christianity as one of 13 equally valid religions. Nor do I view the Golden Rule and "brotherly kindness" as more central than God's Word.



Please ensure that the *Christian Educator's Journal* in the future accepts only advertisements which are in line with the mission of our Christian schools.

Jacqueline De Jong
Grade 4 teacher
Calvin Christian School
Hamilton, Ont.

All Truth Comes from Christ!

Shock. Anger. Dismay. Sadness. This was the emotional gamut I experienced upon seeing the back of the December CEJ and reading the attendant article.

Is there any reason to hold to the Golden Rule apart from Christ? Doesn't the Bible teach that all truth, all values come from Christ? And yet, Beversluis bases his reason for accepting and following the Golden Rule on the "historically and culturally broad consensus" which, he claims, "validates the wisdom, authority and usefulness of the Golden Rule as a principle upon which we can build the moral education of our children." How does such an attitude advance the name and glory of Christ?

Beversluis seems to struggle with the teaching of values. He argues that the poster "provides a more acceptable answer to the question 'Whose values?'" He contends that the poster is a useful way to avoid having to defend the Ten Commandments as the basis for moral education. While this may seem to be an acceptable way to deal with the problem in the public sector, why is it being promoted for Christian homes and schools, where we all ought to be in agreement that there is only one basis for such moral education? God's Word is the only acceptable basis. Why would we want to use other religious materials to encourage moral growth in our children or families?

Why would we even want to hint to our children that other religions have the same moral authority found in Christianity? Why is teaching character education based on Jesus Christ problematic? How is refusing to accept a poster which makes Christianity seem an equal among 13 religions problematic? Why is telling our students that they are required to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with their God (Micah 6:8) problematic?

I am over my shock. My anger has dissipated. However my dismay that CEJ would publish such an article is unabated. That we are unwilling to defend the Gospel and its life-affecting truths more clearly leaves a sadness that will last a long time.

John Klompmaker
Lansing Christian School
Lansing, Illinois

Response:

We received three letters from readers who took issue with our December 2000 article "Teaching the Golden Rules" (and accompanying poster) by Joel Beversluis. That means there must be dozens more teachers who had difficulty with the article and poster but did not bother to respond. Both the author and the editor want to take this opportunity to explain themselves.

Author:

The concerns expressed about the Golden Rules article and poster are common responses to expressions of commonality among religions. Here are some thoughts:

1) Neither my article nor the poster implies that all roads lead to heaven. The emphasis in identifying universal principles is on ethics and character, not salvation.

2) In the pursuit of truthful education, children should be taught both the commonalities and the differences among religions.

3) Suggesting that God's Holy Spirit has worked through and continues to inspire non-Christian cultures and religions — including several that pre-date the Bible — is not pantheistic. Rather, it is proof of the doctrines of common grace and general revelation, for which we can be thankful rather than fearful.

Joel Beversluis

Editor:

I certainly agree with our letter writers about the centrality of the Bible and the supremacy of Christ. If there is disagreement, it seems to come from the degree of (dis)comfort we have about accepting other "golden rules" as viable signposts. I myself see them as confirmation of Romans 1:20: "For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." You don't need to be a Christian to see God's invisible qualities.

Jesus did not invent the Golden Rule. What he taught us about love for neighbor in Matthew 12:7 is a principle that the Triune God embedded in the universe at the time of Creation. The world cannot work properly without it. Of course, the Bible states it more explicitly than the universe. The fact that other religions also have a version of the golden rule tells me that God's communication network is still very active in the world, and I can rejoice at that, without doing injury to the Christian faith.

I can't help picking up positive clues from non-Christians that strengthen my faith. Even the miserable life of an unrepentant alcoholic can be a powerful affirmation of the Gospel for me. It tells me that God's laws are worth keeping.

Bert Witvoet

Milton Viorst, *In the Shadow of the Prophet: The Struggle for the Soul of Islam*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2001, 355 pp. \$25.95.

Reviewed by Harry Antonides (hantonides@look.ca). Antonides is a retired director of the Research Institute and lives in Toronto, Ont.

The Soul of Islam

The murder of thousands of innocent victims on September 11 has forced on our agenda troubling questions about the nature of Islam. We knew that Islam is making inroads into Western Europe and North America in large numbers, and that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world. We also had some inkling that Muslims have rather odd customs pertaining to their diets and religious duties, but for the most part we paid little heed.

But the September 11 atrocities have shaken our complacency. What motivated these hijackers to hate and kill in the name of Allah? One explanation is that the hijackers are part of a small coterie of Muslims who are falsely using the Koran as cover. President Bush has gone out of his way to insist that Islam is not the enemy. But others disagree; they are convinced that bin Laden and his followers are inspired by a view of Islam that has a very long tradition and poses a serious and ongoing threat to all free nations. Who is right?

The answer to that question is of great importance for at least two reasons. The shocking attacks on two prominent symbols of American power, in which thousands of innocent citizens were murdered, were aimed at the entire civilized world. Further, the large influx of millions of Muslims into North America and Europe — including a very determined nucleus of immigrants who consider it their religious duty to replace Western democratic institutions with the rule of Islam — is deeply unsettling.

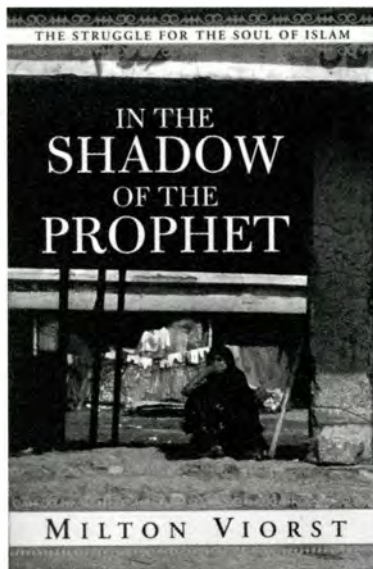
Derailed vision

Milton Viorst is an American journalist who has traveled widely in the Middle East. In an earlier book, *Sandcastles*, he focused on the sorry state of the conditions in the Middle Eastern countries. *In the Shadow of the Prophet* digs deeper because Viorst realizes that we cannot understand the Arab world without insight into the religious teachings that undergird it.

In the Shadow of the Prophet is not a prescriptive book, but an exploration into what has gone wrong “after a dazzling beginning” with the Arab nations. The author does not accept the Arab claim that all would be well if the West would not have dominated them. Neither is he an antagonist, but he writes that after a quarter century of study he has “acquired a fondness for the Arabs and an esteem for their civilization.”

Viorst provides an overview of the historic struggle of the fol-

lowers of Muhammad, who was born in Mecca about 570. By the time of his death in 632, Islam, by conquest and conversion, had a firm foothold. In the next one hundred years Islam spread across the entire Arab world and beyond, reaching into Spain, North Africa, Persia and even India. Then followed a long period of cultural and scientific advancement, but since the Middle Ages, Islam has declined in vigor and stature. Presently all countries dominated by radical Islam are impoverished dictatorships despite the fact that some of them are rich in resources.



The Great Divide

Throughout its history, a tug of war has existed in Islam between those who want to interpret the Koran strictly (fundamentalists) and those who insist that the Koran must be applied in light of changing circumstances (modernists). A strict application of the Koran demands that economics, politics, education, and every other aspect of life are governed by the teachings of the Koran (sharia) as interpreted by the religious teachers. The resulting one-party state has given rise to the worst kind of oppression and brutality, such as cutting off hands and feet for theft, the death penalty for apostasy, and stoning to death for adultery.

In contrast, there are others who want to be loyal Muslims but are convinced that they have to interpret the Koran in ways that are open to

its surroundings and to other than Islamic sources of knowledge. They are prepared to adjust to the demands of a modern democracy and live in peace with non-Muslims.

In the Shadow of the Prophet is an excellent introduction to the tumultuous history and current state of Islam. It is a religion that has inspired a sizeable faction of its adherents to believe that to die in the battle against the “great Satan” and what it represents is an honorable and sacred duty.

A distinguishing feature of this book is that it is based on detailed interviews with numerous major players in the struggle between the Islamic fundamentalists and the modernists. It includes a chapter about Muhammad and the Book, the application of Islamic law (sharia), the violent struggles between the two major Islamic factions in Egypt, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Algeria and Iran, France’s way of coping with the large influx of Muslims — now 10 percent of the French population. It is not a pretty picture, and much blood has flowed.

The most hopeful (concluding) chapter describes the role of



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the late King Hussein of Jordan, whose view of Islam is far removed from the fatwa-yielding ayatollahs. In a lengthy interview with the author, the king argues for a form of pluralism that safeguards the freedom of all citizens. He rejects the isolationism that is responsible for the backwardness and poverty afflicting millions in the Islamic countries. Whether he is realistic in advocating such a sanitized version of Islam remains to be seen, but his views are a welcome alternative to those who can see only evil in the Western democracies.

This is a fascinating contribution to much needed reflection on the meaning of Islam. Viorst is right in saying that the West

can no longer ignore the ideas that drive the Arab world: "Whoever wins the factional struggle within Islam will acquire a great prize. At the least, the winner will determine the shape that relations take, in the short term and the long, between the Islamic world and the West."

Islam has posed a serious challenge to Christians for almost fourteen centuries. But no one can dispute that this confrontation is now particularly urgent for us Christians. The question is whether we are well prepared for this demanding challenge. I am not so sure. What do you think?

Cheating and Plagiarism

Anna peeks at Kristen's test paper when she thinks the teacher is not looking. Emily hands in a

paper that reads remarkably like an encyclopedia. James keeps referring to his calculator on his lap during a test, even though the teacher has specifically stated that calculators were not to be used. Paul turns in an essay on Adolf Hitler written, the teacher thinks, in a style different from the student's usual one. In one way or another, all these students are cheating.

Cheating in school, of course, is nothing new. But recent technology — computers, calculators, cell phones and other equipment — have made cheating more sophisticated. Do students in Christian schools cheat? Any teacher or administrator with any experience will recall numerous examples of cheating and plagiarism.

Do we really need an entire book about cheating and plagiarism? Ann Lathrop and Kathleen Foss think so. They are persuaded, in fact, that cheating is a growing problem. They say, "We have written this book with the belief that each person who reads it can and will help reverse the steady increase in student cheating and plagiarism" (p. xiii).

In Part I, "A Wake-up Call," the authors answer the question, What's going on? They cite a number of national surveys that document how much cheating is going on and show that it is not only prevalent but also increasing. Cheating, unfortunately, has become more socially acceptable and more sophisticated. Today cheating is easy, few get caught, and those that do get caught

Ann Lathrop and Kathleen Foss, *Student Cheating and Plagiarism in the Internet Era: A Wake-up Call*. Englewood, Colorado: Libraries Unlimited. 2000, 255 pages. Reviewed by Robert L. Otte, Media Specialist, South Christian High School, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

most often face relatively mild punishment.

The authors go on to explain how

new technology has made cheating easier than ever. For example, thousands of reports, research papers, and book reviews are available online for free or a fee. Some Internet sources even offer to write papers for students, meaning that any student with a credit card has access to totally plagiarized papers.

In Part II, "A Call to Action," the authors answer the question, What can we do? This section makes the book valuable for schools. The authors argue for what we in Christian education would think the obvious — the development of moral education. And that begins at home, in partnership with the school ... and the church. Although the authors write from a secular position, much of their discourse is relevant for Christian educators as well.

To make the abstract more specific, the authors follow up with a series of chapters on developing "an academic integrity policy." These chapters define cheating and plagiarism, recommend that any use of technology for illicit purposes be prohibited, and establish appropriate procedures and penalties for those caught violating the policy. A separate chapter is designed to help teachers define cheating and plagiarism for students. The intent here is the reminder that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

The final section, Part III, "Taking Action," should be helpful for teachers and administrators as they try to make cheating

The important role religion has historically played and the influence it continues to have on American civil life and politics is neglected by most introductory political science texts. *In God We Trust?* is a supplement to the American political story for students interested in exploring the relationship between religion and American politics in greater depth.

This volume is uniquely structured to parallel most commonly used political science textbooks. Thus, for each standard chapter on American politics (e.g., "American Political Culture," "Public Opinion," "Congress") there is a corresponding chapter in this volume that focuses on the relationship between religion and that particular topic.

In God We Trust? is the latest addition to the RenewedMinds imprint published in partnership with the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities.

In God We Trust? Religion and American Political Life
Corwin E. Smidt, editor ISBN # 0-8010-2261-4 Paperback \$24.99
Order through: Baker Book House Call: 1-800-877-2665

Corwin E. Smidt (Ph.D., University of Iowa) teaches political science at Calvin College and is director of the Paul B. Henry Institute for the Study of Christianity and Politics.

"*In God We Trust?* Offers anyone interested in relating Christianity and public life an invaluable basis for understanding the theory and practice of politics from a Christian perspective."

~ Stephen P. Hoffmann, Chair,
Department of Political Science,
Taylor University



"Finally there is a book that takes seriously the role of religion in the major institutions and processes of the American political system. Smidt is to be congratulated for putting together a collection of readings that is neither antagonistic nor sentimental in perspective but reflects good scholarship. Crisply written,

this book is a welcome supplement to even the most comprehensive national government text."

~ Mel Hailey
Ablene Christian University

and plagiarism more difficult. Again, the authors offer much practical advice on topics such as reducing cheating on tests and assignments, working with the librarian to design plagiarism-proof research assignments, and re-structuring assignments to reduce cheating. They even show teachers how technology itself can be used to thwart cheating. This section ends with an annotated list of "Internet cheatsites" — along with reminders to the teachers that, if they let students know that they are aware of these "cheatsites," the students will think twice about using them.

All administrators should consider purchasing this book. They should make it available to their staffs for personal use and, possibly, discussion. Teachers will find the many "Copy Me" pages beneficial. Students must be taught how to use technology properly or they will enter the workplace with the same bad habits they have acquired in their schools. For a time when honesty and integrity are not common virtues, this is an important book. It may help turn the tide.

University uncovers plagiarism bombshell

(Report in the January 7, 2002, issue of the *National Post*)

VANCOUVER — Simon Fraser University has uncovered a cheating scandal of "unprecedented" proportions, involving dozens of business students who submitted identical papers in a third-year course. A total of 47 student will be sent letters today saying the university will recommend they be given a failing grade in the course for plagiarism.

Roger Blackman, the associate dean in the faculty of arts, called it the worst case of cheating he had seen in 35 years of teaching. He said the students accused of cheating all gave identical answers in their five- to seven-page papers, which were worth 25 % of their final grade in the statistics course....

Rob Clift, director of the Confederation of University Faculty Associations of B.C., said Simon Fraser would have jeopardized its academic reputation if it had tried to sweep the incident under the rug.... Mr Clift said the Internet heightens the temptation: "What is a growing problem has to do with kids plagiarizing off the Internet and buying ready-made essays."

The University of British Columbia has recently joined a U.S.-based Web site to catch cheats. The Turnitin.com search engine looks for matches between students' work and published work on the Internet.

Last year, the University of Toronto law school was scandalized when 25 first-year students fudged grades on summer job applications. The students were disciplined, with the most severe penalty, a one-year suspension, being meted out to 17.

In five surveys of U.S. university students by the Center for Academic Integrity at Duke University in North Carolina, two-thirds of students polled admitted to cheating at least once.

Epic Episode

A Lesson in Reconciliation

by Barbara Carvill

Barbara Carvill is professor of German at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich. This story is an excerpt from The Gift of the Stranger, a book she co-authored with David Smith.

In the summer of 1994, I taught a course in foreign language methodology to Chinese teachers of English in Chengdu, the capital of the province of Sichuan. One weekend, Chinese officials arranged a bus tour to the countryside for us to visit the gigantic Buddha of Leshan. There were about 35 Christian teachers from North America on the bus.

The day was going by pleasantly enough until, as we were riding back along a very narrow road through a village, an approaching tractor loaded high with bales of straw and driven by a young Chinese man squeezed too close to the bus. The bales struck the bus and smashed all the windows on the driver's side, covering the passengers with shards of very sharp glass. Although many of us had multiple cuts, nobody was seriously hurt. Those who were not harmed helped the injured passengers out of the bus and bandaged their wounds.

While first aid was being attended to, our Chinese guide led the young tractor driver along the line of Americans and made him look at every injury he had caused. With tears in his eyes he mumbled something as he went along, probably an apology. Then we waited for the police to come.

In the meantime, however, more and more townsfolk gathered and huddled around the culprit. They were debating some issue, but we didn't know what the point of contention was. After a while, our tour guide came over to tell me that the driver of the tractor did not feel forgiven. I assured her that we were fine and that she should tell him not to worry. But, our guide insisted, what he wanted to hear was a word of forgiveness directly from the mouth of an American, and not through the interpreter.

After making sure all injured members of our team were actually ready to forgive the fellow, I, the team leader and the only person in the group who could speak a few words in Chinese, looked in vain for an appropriate expression in my Chinese textbook. I found phrases for all kinds of occasions, but *forgiving someone* was not listed. Therefore I had to ask our Chinese interpreter for the appropriate expression, which I quickly learned by heart. Then I went to the huddle of people gathered around the culprit and, looking the young man in the eye, repeatedly spoke my memorized phrase with great intensity and conviction. Enormous relief came over the frightened face of the driver, and the folk standing around shook my hands with gratitude.

We learned three things from this incident. First, Chinese buses do not have safety glass! Second, we Americans act very differently in such situations. When we are involved in traffic accidents, we exchange insurance details and avoid talking to the other party for fear of jeopardizing our insurance claims. These Chinese villagers, on the other hand, did not reduce the relationship between victim and perpetrator to a merely legal one. Instead they acted in a way that resonates with Christian convictions concerning reconciliation and forgiveness. This cross-cultural encounter made us aware of some highly questionable features of our own North American practices. And, third, the textbook had not prepared us well. It obviously did not count *forgiving someone for wrongs done* among the essential language functions a foreigner might need.