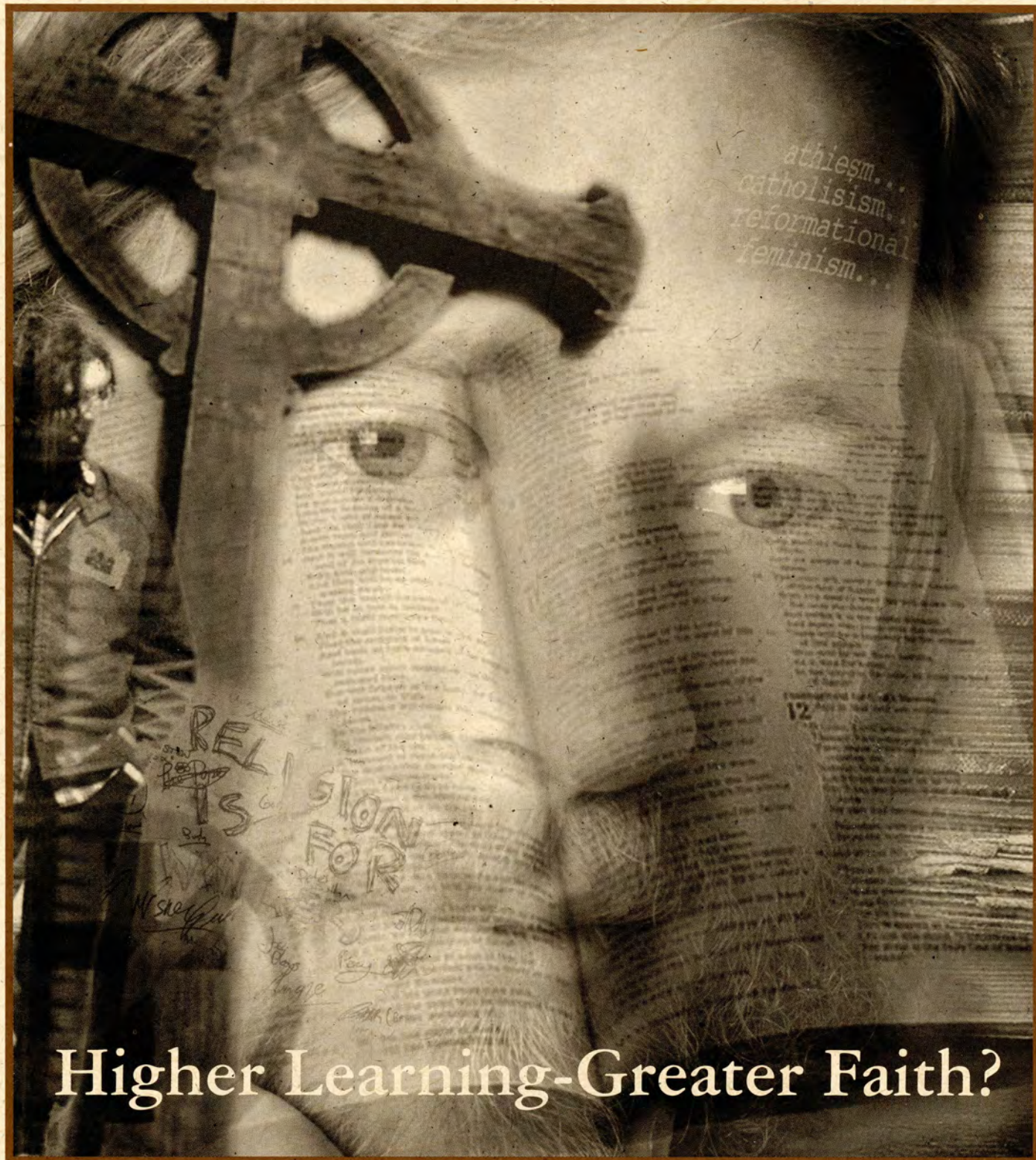


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Higher Learning-Greater Faith?



Bert Witvoet

How Universities Suppress the Truth

According to the Apostle Paul, you don't need a university education to lead you out of ignorance; in fact, you don't need an education at

all for that. The second half of Romans 2 (verses 18 to 32) makes it abundantly clear that God's invisible qualities are plain to all people. And if you understand God's character, you are no longer ignorant. So education can lead someone into *greater* understanding about God's world but not out of *no* understanding.

Forgive me for pointing out the obvious, namely, that I am playing on the word "education," which is derived from the Latin *educare*, which means to lead out of. This is not just a lesson in semantics, however. Our society really believes the lie that our educational institutions are there to lead us out of ignorance. The example of a recent scientific experiment further down this editorial, I believe drives that point home with some clarity.

Counter-cultural stuff

I love reading Paul's epistle to the Romans because it, of all his writings, leads you beside many politically incorrect still waters. If you want to be guided in ways of righteousness for his name's sake instead of being led down the garden path of secular self-righteousness, read Paul's description of people either as objects of God's mercy or as objects of God's wrath. It's enough to make a decent humanist wail.

Or catch his description of our human condition apart from God: "They [we] are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless." For a post-modern North-American brought up on a steady diet of self-affirmation, it's like walking through the valley of the shadow of death.

Deliberate falsification

But I digress from the main point I have gleaned from my reading of Romans 2, namely, that people suppress the truth about God and God's reality. And the majority of colleges and universities lead the way. I like that expression "suppress the truth." It suggests a deliberate act and the application of some force on our part to keep the truth down. The truth represents reality as it is. God is truth, and so is his unspoiled creation. The lie, on the other hand, covers the truth with a blanket of denial. The lie is nothing in and of itself. Take away the lie, and what you have left is the truth as God made it. For the truth to be no longer evident, we have to suppress it. And our society spends a lot of resources in the exercise of suppressing the truth. No won-

der God is angry. "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people who suppress the

truth by their wickedness."

We read in Romans 2 that all people, regardless of their level of education or cultural environment, can know the truth about reality (which begins with knowing the truth about God) because God has made these things plain since the creation of the world. But secular scientists need to do a few experiments before they can come even close to that statement.

Detecting cheaters

In a recent experiment that involved cards that showed one picture on the top and one on the bottom, people were tested on their ability to know when they were being cheated and when not. They were promised that if the top shows a bird, the bottom will show an orange. Students are shown a card with only the top picture revealed. It shows a bird. The students are then asked what the bottom picture has to show in order for them not to feel cheated. The answer is obvious: an orange. If the students are shown only the bottom, and the bottom shows an orange, they do not need to see the top in order to know whether they have been cheated. If the top shows a bird, they have not been cheated. But if the top shows an elephant, they have not been cheated either because there was no promise made that an elephant at the top will show an orange at the bottom.

The experiment was carried out with non-literate rainforest people, living almost in the stone age, and with Harvard undergraduates. What did the anthropologists who conducted the test discover? That the illiterate Indians did equally well as the Harvard students in determining when they had been cheated. Conclusion? "There's every reason to suspect that understanding when one has been cheated is not something you get from book learning," said Cornell University economist Robert H. Frank, "but it's part of the basic equipment that we need to function as a person in this world" (August 13, 2002, article in the *National Post* entitled "Knowing how to spot a cheater doesn't depend on education: Amazon Indians scored equal to Harvard undergrads.")

Really now. You mean to say that one does not have to go to university to know when a promise is not being kept? Are there even people (besides scientists) in our society who for one nanosecond contemplate this burning question of knowing whether uneducated people can tell a cheater when they see one? Forgive my cynicism here, but aren't there more significant issues that need scientific research?

Of course, the anthropologists who conducted the test have to

relate their findings to their concept of evolution. One of them, Lawrence Sugiyama, of the University of Oregon, believes that before the primitive hominid ancestors of modern humans appeared on the earth, the brain evolved a special circuit devoted to detecting cheaters because knowing when one has been cheated is a social necessity. "Is there a fundamental, underlying, reliably developed gizmo in the brain, a little reasoning thing that's dedicated to social exchange and specifically dedicated to detecting cheaters? We think there is," he was quoted as saying in the *National Post* article of August 13.

Futile thinking

Although the test can be said to confirm what we are told in Romans 2:18-20, namely, that people have the basic equipment to know the truth, it, nevertheless, also stands condemned by the same passage. The Apostle Paul writes: "The wrath of God is being revealed against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them. 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."

The refusal of ungodly scientists to acknowledge God's hand in the creation of human beings, made in the image of God, able to know what's good and what's bad, and understanding the invisible qualities of God, amounts to a suppression of the truth. First you suppress the truth about human beings having been made in the image of God, knowing good and evil because they have been given a "fundamental, underlying, reliably developed gizmo in the brain" by their Creator, and then you undertake an elaborate test on two continents to discover that it's not education that makes people aware of when they have been cheated. "Romans 2 says: "Their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools...."

I'm glad the Lord is my Shepherd. He has a habit of restoring my soul after reading about self-generating brain circuits.

Bert Witvoet

Post Script

This issue of CEJ includes a few articles that have to do with university or college education. Dr. Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., writes about why Calvinists love to establish colleges. He approaches the subject from positive Reformed convictions about life, the world and education. In the light of Romans 2, I am adding a negative motivation. I suggest that another reason why Calvinists start their own colleges is because they can't stand the suppression of the truth in academia.

Dr. Jack Stauder tells of his attempt to teach a course in religion at a secular university and how, though he was an agnostic, he could not endure the intolerant and judgmental attitudes toward orthodox religions. It seems that a heavy cloud of godless thinking hangs over the educational institutions of our western world. The truth is being suppressed in colleges and universities big time.

BW

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Why Calvinists Love Colleges

by Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.

Cornelius Plantinga is president and professor of systematic theology at Calvin Theological Seminary, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The following article is an excerpt from the introduction to his recent book Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living. Used by permission from Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI. The publisher can be contacted at 1-800-253-7521 or www.eerdmans.com.

In a pamphlet of 1643, the founders of Harvard College wrote their mission statement for the new school, and capped it with some straight talk about the purpose of higher education. The founders said this: "Let every Student be plainly instructed, and earnestly pressed, to consider well [that] the maine end of his life and studies is *to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life*, Jn.17:3, and therefore to lay *Christ* in the bottome, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and Learning."¹

Harvard began life in union with Jesus Christ. Its founders were Puritans, which is to say they were English-speaking Calvinists, and they established Harvard only a few years after they had gotten off the boat at Massachusetts Bay. They could hardly wait to build a college.

As a matter of fact, they and their descendants could hardly wait to build a lot of colleges. Harvard was just for starters. According to one historian of New England, the United States had about 200 colleges by the time of the Civil War in the 1860s, and two-thirds of them were either founded or controlled by the theological heirs of John Calvin.²

"Something there is about Calvinism that likes a college," writes James Bratt (with apologies to Robert Frost), and this has been so from the start.³

In 1559, the reformer John Calvin urged his local government to establish an academy in Geneva, and then accepted an appointment as one of its first five professors. From then till now, people of Calvinist outlook have set up colleges wherever they've settled. In fact, they have lent their minds, hearts and money to the cause of Christian higher education so often that the name of a place like "Calvin College" (my own alma mater) is almost redundant.

but also whatever knowledge he could gather from such famous pagans as the Roman philosopher Seneca.

And why not? The Holy Spirit authors all truth, as Calvin wrote, and we should therefore embrace it no matter where it shows up. But we will need solid instruction in Scripture and Christian wisdom in order to recognize truth, and in order to disentangle it from error and fraud. Well-instructed Christians try not to offend the



Holden Chapel at Harvard University

Hunger for knowledge

Why such enthusiasm for Christian colleges among Calvinists? No doubt one reason is that John Calvin himself loved the life of learning. Calvin understood that God created human beings to hunt and gather truth, and that, as a matter of fact, the capacity for doing so amounts to one feature of the image of God in them (Col. 3:10).

So Calvin fed on knowledge as gladly as a deer on sweet corn. He absorbed not only the teaching of Scripture and of its great interpreters, such as St. Augustine,

Holy Spirit by scorning truth in non-Christian authors over whom the Spirit has been brooding, but this does not mean Christians can afford to read these authors uncritically.⁴ After all, a person's faith, even in idols, shapes most of what a person thinks and writes, and the Christian faith is in competition with other faiths for human hearts and minds.

Tradition of learning

But John Calvin's own love of learning is only one reason for the appearance of Harvard and its descendants. Long before

Harvard and the Genevan Academy, medieval Christians established universities in Paris, Oxford, Cambridge, and elsewhere, centering their study in liberal arts. Before and alongside the universities, Christian monks preserved and extended knowledge to such a significant degree that many historians, Christian and non-Christian alike, credit the monks with saving Western civilization.

In any case, to do what comes naturally for human beings — that is, to pursue learning — Christians have wanted colleges. And to pursue learning in the light of God's Word, they have wanted *Christian* colleges — Catholic, Calvinist, Lutheran, Wesleyan, Baptist, Mennonite, independent — each with its own approach to the integration of faith, learning, and service.

What would all these Christians do in their colleges? What would make these schools distinctive?

Thoughtful Christians know that if we obey the Bible's great commandment to love God with our whole mind, as well as with everything else, then we will study the splendor of God's creation in hope of grasping part of the ingenuity and grace that forms it. One way to love God is to know and love God's work. Learning is therefore a *spiritual* calling: properly done, it attaches us to God.

In addition, the learned person has, so to speak, more to be Christian *with*.⁵ The person who studies chemistry, for example, can enter into God's enthusiasm for the dynamic possibilities of material reality. The student who examines one of the great movements of history has moved into position to praise the goodness of God, or to lament the mystery of evil, or to explore the places where these things intertwine. Further, from persistent study of history a student may develop good judgment, a feature of wisdom that helps us lead a faithful human life in the midst of a confusing world. And, of course,

chemistry and history are only two samples from the wide menu of good things to learn.

Essential for service

But Calvin and his followers, who wanted to "reform the church according to the Word of God," had yet another purpose in mind when they built colleges. "Reformed" Christians, as they came to be called, have always believed that getting educated is one way to prepare for service in the Kingdom of God. It's not the only way, but it's an excellent way.

Certainly, if you hope to reform a church, a government, or an academy, you will need a standard to go by, and the highest and best standard for reforming all of life, so Calvin and others believed, is the written Word of God. Educated Christians therefore need to "know their Bible" in order to lead a life that fits in with the purposes of God. But to reform a complex institution — or, as a matter of fact, to write a law, treat a patient, or perform any of a number of other human undertakings — you will need to gain wisdom from many sources in addition to Scripture. You will need to look for truth wherever it may be found.

Restorative purpose

The point of all this learning is to prepare to add one's own contribution to the supreme reformation project, which is God's restoration of all things that have been corrupted by evil. The Old Testament word for this restoration of peace, justice, and harmony is *shalom*; the New Testament phrase for it is "the coming of the kingdom."

You can find the Old Testament's teaching about *shalom* especially in the prophets, and you can find the New Testament's teaching about the kingdom especially in the gospels and in some passages of St.

Paul's epistles. According to Scripture, God plans to accomplish this project through Jesus Christ, who started to make "all things new," and who will come again to finish what he started. In the meantime, God's Spirit inspires a worldwide body of people to join this mission of God.

So when Christians strive to make God's purposes their own, they tilt forward toward God's restoration of all things, the final coming of the kingdom. They think about it, pray for it, study and work in ways that accord with it. Thinking personally as well as globally, they want the kingdom to come in their own hearts as well as in the whole world.

Admittedly, given the depth and range of evil, such cosmic restoration sometimes looks doubtful. But in a world that can be forever changed by terrorists in hijacked airliners on a bright Tuesday morning in September, restoration also looks desperately necessary. In either case, Christians live by faith in Jesus Christ, and when their faith leans forward toward the coming of the kingdom, they call it hope. The person who pursues a college education in hope, and who then shapes his or her life accordingly for service in the kingdom, such a person has a calling that will outlast every recession. The motto of Wheaton College, one of the leaders in the Christian college movement, has it exactly right: Christian higher education is "For Christ and His Kingdom."

In the case of Calvin College, its leaders stated back in 1921 that they wanted a college in which young adults would gain an education that was Christian all the way through. College faculty and staff would knead the yeast of the gospel through everything that happened on campus, so that "all the students' intellectual, emotional, and imaginative activities" would be "permeated with the spirit and teaching of Christianity."⁶

Lordship project

This thoroughgoing vision of Christian higher education may be traced to John Calvin, and to others before him, but its nearer proponent for Calvin College was Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), an extraordinary Dutch theologian, newspaper editor, and prime minister. Kuyper took a large view of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, assuming that when Scripture says God has made Jesus Christ “the head over all things” (Eph. 4:22), “all” means what it says.

Thus, Kuyper’s most famous saying: “There is not a square inch on the whole plain of human existence over which Christ, who is Lord over all, does not proclaim: ‘This is Mine!’”⁷ As generations have seen, the implication is staggeringly clear: those who follow Christ must bring all the parts and passions of their lives — including education — under the Lordship of Christ.

Christians of many kinds undertake this project in many ways. Colleges in the holiness traditions may start their educational philosophy by thinking that “a holy life means a whole life,” in education as anywhere else. Colleges in Lutheran and Anabaptist traditions may center their thinking on Christ’s suffering servanthood, and a Christian’s “strength in weakness” that flows from Christ.

But no matter how a Christian college plans to integrate faith, learning, and service, it will never just conduct education-as-usual. Not if it is serious about Christian higher education. It won’t even do education-as-usual with Bible classes tacked on, or education-as-usual with prayers before class, or education-as-usual with a Service-Learning component and a ten o’clock chapel break.

Sure foundation

No, a solidly built Christian college will rise from its faith in Jesus Christ, and then



Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.

explore the height and depth, the length and breadth, of what it *means* to build on this faith — not just for four years at college, but also for a lifetime of learning and work within the kingdom of God. In short, like the Puritans at Harvard, the sponsors of top-notch Christian higher education in the twenty-first century will “lay Christ in the bottome.”

Of course, it’s one thing to start a Christian college and another thing to keep such a college Christian. Harvard University no longer functions as a distinctly Christian college, and people on its campus don’t always speak well of Puritans. The same goes for most of those other Christian colleges that had been established by the time of the American Civil War. These institutions gradually slid off their foundation. We may be sobered by such slippage, but perhaps we shouldn’t be surprised. Keeping a strong Christian purpose on any campus requires enormous effort. To succeed in this undertaking, a college’s trustees, faculty, administration, staff, and most of its students and constituents have to work and pray in the same direction, trying aggressively to combine the whole life of the mind with the whole life of service under the headship of Christ. What’s more, they must introduce this project to each new class of students, helping them see its strength and beauty.

Reformed accent

When I was its Dean of the Chapel, Calvin College commissioned me to write a monograph on a Reformed perspective for Christian education. I have edited it for the wider Christian audience served by the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities, but I still write as who I am — a Christian minister in the Reformed tradition who probably quotes Calvin too often. To say the theological location from which I write is “Reformed” might seem to distinguish it from, say, Lutheran, Catholic, Holiness, or Anabaptist perspectives.⁹ And, indeed, there is something characteristic about the pattern of emphases within a Reformed outlook on life and learning — including, for example, an emphasis on the immensity of creation, fall, and redemption. All has been created good, including the full range of human cultures that emerge when humans act according to God’s design. But all has been corrupted by evil, including not only culture, but also the natural world. So all — the whole cosmos — must be redeemed by Jesus Christ the Lord. What follows is that all of life is sacred: the whole of it stands under the blessing, judgment, and redeeming purposes of God.

When Christians talk this way they are speaking with a Reformed accent, and perhaps with an Augustinian one. (The writing of the great fifth century North African bishop, St. Augustine, is as close as we get, after Scripture, to a universal Christian voice.) Every Christian naturally speaks the faith with his own accent, and you may be used to hearing the faith spoken in tones somewhat different from the one you will find in this book.

Still, I think I can say that its main lines belong to what C. S. Lewis (with thanks to Richard Baxter) called “mere Christianity,” a historic, frankly supernatural vision of the triune God, creation, and their rela-

Only the Holy Spirit can blow across your bow strongly enough to turn you around for good...

tion. This vision derives from Scripture, centers on the person and work of Jesus Christ, and grows rich from the contributions of ecumenical creeds, church confessions, and the thinking of such heavyweight theologians as Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, and Barth. In these respects, I believe you will find my book to be not only Reformed, but also catholic and evangelical.

Search for worldview

The idea in this book is to lay out some main themes of the Christian faith and to show how Christian higher education fits inside a view of the world and of human life that is formed by these themes. Perhaps you will read this book near the beginning of your Christian higher education as an introduction to it, or near the end, as a summary of it. In any case, a coherent understanding of the big themes — creation, fall, redemption, vocation, the kingdom of God, the hope of shalom — may become a kind of frame for your education, so that (if you cannot already do so) some day you will be able not merely to recognize a Christian “world and life view,” but also to articulate one.

I should add that nobody assumes you will automatically *adopt* such a view. Your college leaders naturally hope that you will find this perspective inviting and, finally,

compelling. But they know you may have come to college with another scheme for organizing your ultimate loves and loyalties, and that you might leave with it unchanged. Maybe you're at a Christian college only because your parents sent you there. Maybe you will change your mind about “first things” five times in four years. In any case, no human being can change your mind for you. Only the Holy Spirit can start Pentecost. Only the Holy Spirit can blow across your bow strongly enough to turn you around for good, but your college can help you hoist your sails. It can help you to see, and invite you to ponder, a Christian vision of the world and of education that we older brothers and sisters think is big, challenging, and dynamic. More important, we think it is true. We think it arises naturally from Scripture, and that it possesses great power to organize and inspire human life and learning.

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1) “New England’s First Fruits,” quoted in Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, *The Puritans* (New York: American Book, 1938), 702.

2) E. Digby Baltzell, *Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia* (Boston: Beacon, 1979), 248.

3) James D. Bratt, “Reformed Tradition & the Mission of Reformed Colleges”

(Grand Rapids: unpublished, 1993), 1.

4) Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1:273-74 (II, ii, 15); 1:270-71 (II, ii, 12).

5) Education “develops, disciplines, and matures our humanity” and thus enables us to make a Christian profession that is “humanly significant.” Henry Zylstra, *Testament of Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 142.

6) *Yearbook of the Theological School and Calvin College, 1916-17*, 36.

7) Kuyper, “Souvereiniteit in Eigen Kring” (Amsterdam: Krugt, 1880), 32.

8) In *How Now Shall we Live?* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1999), a celebrated statement of an evangelical Christian worldview, Colson and Nancy Pearcey list Kuyper with Calvin, C. S. Lewis, and Francis Schaeffer as their most important mentors.

9) Churches of the Swiss reformation in the 16th century began to call themselves *Reformed* to distinguish themselves from Lutherans, who were thought to have begun the Reformation without finishing it. Some Reformed people still think in this way about Lutherans, but politely refrain from saying so.

Difficult Learners

Clarence Joldersma (cjolders@calvin.edu) professor of education at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich., asks: “Are there more hyperactive, ADD, LD and other kids who have difficulty learning in our schools than there used to be? How do we deal with students who have difficulty learning in the ways that we tend to teach?”

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), executive director of the Niagara Association for Christian Education. He lives in Smithville, Ontario

April 2, 2002

Now, there's a topic, Clarence, that could launch a career: you could spend your life reading books and journals, attending workshops and conferences, doing research on these questions. Are we as a profession at the saturation point with trying to accommodate for student disabilities? Is that because we have over-diagnosed, over-defined and labeled? Do we expect that a diagnosis will bring a remedy, and that we can fix our disabilities? Do these labels really mask a much more complex mix of physiological and psychological issues that schools cannot address? Disquieting questions that I have heard. Whatever the answers to those questions, haven't teachers responded to these learning needs in a variety of ways over the past years? Who among us is teaching as we did a dozen years ago? We *have* responded! We *have* changed the ways we teach. We use active learning strategies (such as activities,



Lois Brink

authentic problems), attention focusing tools (such as study guides and computer applications). We manage classroom to reduce stress in the learning setting (such as providing routines and assignment structures, accommodations for test taking). We teach using Eric Jensen's key words for “deep processing” and learning enrichment: challenge, feedback, novelty, coherence and focused use of time. We offer choices, bridges, alternatives. Most of all, we give purposeful support, good humor, one-on-one help. We come into our classrooms with better understanding of student needs and training in the use of successful tactics that reach into the gifts of a variety of learners. So I conclude that the needs of these learners have propelled change in our teaching strategies and that this has been a good thing.

Lois

April 3, 2002

Clarence and Lois, I wonder how we respond to government impulses to introduce standardized tests. I personally like what they can mean for accountability for those who run the system, but how can we protect those who learn in different ways who may never pass this type of test, yet find it required for graduation? I can think of two things that should be considered. First, we ought to have our own diploma, so that these students can achieve a high school diploma and graduate without the standardized test if necessary and, second, we ought to work with the state to create meaningful assessments that don't undermine the intent of such testing, but provide for options for all God's children.



Tony Kamphuis

Tony

April 4, 2002

I agree with Lois when she says that teachers are more aware of learning differences and are more willing and able to make accommodations. Whether there are more students with learning difficulties and attention disorders is difficult to know. However, I think there always were many students that had learning difficulties. We all can remember the students who were left behind or dropped out of school. These students were considered to be lazy or stupid. Today these students would be thought of differently. Recent brain research indicates that people with learning difficulties use their



Pam Adams



Clarence Joldersma

brains in a different manner than others. All teachers, and especially Christian teachers, should learn as much as they can about how to help each and every student. Unfortunately, you still hear about teachers who are unwilling to change how they teach.
Pam

April 22, 2002

Pam, Lois, Clarence, let me throw this question into the mix: Is it possible for us to shape the experience of schools to the extent that every type of learner can succeed? Or are we just kidding ourselves and changing the definitions of *school* and *education* beyond recognition. Maybe we'd be better off to let schools be schools and focus on academic achievement, but get rid of compulsory attendance and have alternative institutions available for those who would benefit from different experiences.

Tony

May 2, 2002

Pam, Lois, Tony, you have given many excellent responses to this question. It seems our schools have become more aware of student learning difficulties which have always existed; we have tried to accommodate students of all kinds, because they are all created in the image of God. Many special-needs teachers are passionate about inclusion, since the 'weak' are just as much members of the body of the Christ as the 'strong'. By working together, allowing the body parts to see how they need one another, the honorable as well as the less honorable, the Christian school community becomes a body of Christ. Where one weeps, they all weep; where one rejoices, all are glad. We cannot grow as we ought unless the body image is in place, the way God delineated it in 1 Corinthian 12. We have learned a great deal about this in the last 25 years as teachers and leaders. There is still lots of opportunity to grow!

Johanna



Johanna Campbell

May 4, 2002

Folks, I wanted to muse a bit more about different learners. I think that as reformed educators we need to talk more carefully about students who learn differently,(e.g., not whole to part , not like we teach, or who need to move around every little while), those students who have brokenness that mani-

fest in school learning (e.g., learning disabilities such as ADD and high aptitude, disability to do verbal learning tasks, etc.), and those who have real brokenness that manifests itself or gets combined with learning differences or learning disabilities (e.g., those students with depression, Ausberger's syndrome, piromania, abuse issues). Do we tend to lump them all into a category we call "problems with learning differences or different learning needs" when their brokenness is much more complex and other-rooted?

Such a self-evident point, but we do need to remind ourselves that this brokenness is not always healed by teaching differently or accommodating learners' differences. Should we reformed educators be aware of the pervasive and perhaps even humanist assumption that we can understand and accommodate and maybe even cure restore all kinds of learning problems in the school structure? Is the answer to try harder to pay attention to each of our ... sometimes 135 ... students?

Often I hear simplistic solutions to learner problems that are very complex and rooted in fallenness. How can we seek long term solutions that our community can embrace that supports restoration and life long learning opportunities?

Lois

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Grades



by Charles Adams

Charles Adams is professor of engineering at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa.

Half way through a semester at college a disturbing phenomenon is occurring with a particularly high frequency. That phenomenon is "course dropping." It's occurring at especially high frequency among freshmen.

Why do students drop courses halfway through? One good reason for doing so is the realization on the part of the student that he or she does not have the prerequisite knowledge to benefit from the course. Theoretically, if the student has been advised properly, this should not happen. But advising is a tricky business. Another possible justification for dropping a course halfway through is the realization that the

student's interests and talents lie in a different direction. While the student may be capable of succeeding in the course, she will gain little benefit by staying with it.

Those are two legitimate reasons for dropping a course part way through. Other legitimate reasons, usually over which the student has no control, are sickness, and problems at home which require the student to leave campus.

Indication of self-worth?

But from what I've observed, there is another reason. Many students are dropping courses because they believe they are getting low grades. Most students come to college from high school with fairly good grade point averages. Although they may have gotten an occasional "C" here and there, they are used to receiving "A"s and

"B"s. It's very likely that all through grade school and high school their parents praised them when they brought home "A"s on their report cards and gave them grief when they brought home "C"s. This is reinforced at school by such things as honor rolls, honor societies, and potential college scholarship — all of which place a heavy emphasis on grades. Unfortunately, the student fails to see that grades are merely a device used to measure how much he or she has learned, and, instead begins to see grades as a measure of self-worth.

This misplaced emphasis on grades is somewhat understandable, but not excusable. After all, each student is created different, blessed with unique talents, and called to responsible service in ways that differ from each other student. Thus we ought not expect our students to get all

Science Equipment Needed for Akiba (Treasure) School Nairobi, Kenya



This Christian School has recently added Form 1 (9th Grade) to its curriculum. Its Science Lab is very poorly equipped. If your school has any of the materials listed below and would like to donate it to Akiba School or would like more information about the school, please contact Jeni Hoekstra at 616-977-2624 or by e-mail at Jeni62@aol.com

For Biology:

A light Microscope
Dissecting Blades
Cover Slips
Hand Lenses (2)
Slides

For Chemistry:

Bunsen Burners (2)
Round Bottomed Flasks (4)
Conical Flasks (4)
Measuring Cylinder (2)

Burette (1)
Filter Funnel (1)
Thermometer (1)
Filter Papers
Test Tubes (12)
Flat-Bottomed Flasks (4)
Beakers (4)
Biling Tubes (2)
Pipette (1)
Volumetric Flax (1)
Tripod Stand (1)
Mortar & Pestle

Chemicals Needed:

Copper Sulphate
Proponone
Copper Metal
Iodine
Potassium Nitrate

For Physics:

Engineer's Callipers (2)
Micrometer Screw Gauge (1)
Beam Balance
Retord Stand
Varnier Callipers (1)
Eureka Can (1)
Top Pan Balance
Spring Balance

and the Heidelberg Catechism

“A”s, whether in high school or in college. In fact, I have real concern for those students who do maintain “straight A” or “4.0” averages. My guess is that such a student is playing the system, probably learning a lot of things that are unimportant to him or her, and probably failing to grow in some other areas of life, probably crucial ones, that are not measured by grades.

Only comfort

But now back to the main point. I think that students are dropping courses halfway through because they believe they are getting low grades (low grades for most students are “C” or less), and their self-image can’t handle the psychic blow that they attach to getting those low grades. Students with talents and interests in a particular area, but whose less-than-perfect high-

school preparation in that area mean that a few low grades are inevitable at first, are dropping out not just of courses, but also career fields because of their hang-up with grades.

That’s why we have to work harder to teach our students to better understand the meaning of the first question and answer to the Heidelberg Catechism, “What is your only comfort in life and in death?” The answer has nothing to do with high grades, high salaries, secure jobs, or comfortable homes. Instead the answer is: “That I am not my own....” Our students need to learn that they are not their own, that they belong to their Lord, and that, therefore, their worth is not measured by grades. And they certainly are not all called to get straight “A”s.

To any student who is reading this ar-

ticle, I would urge you to not worry about grades. If you work to develop the talents and interests that the Lord has created in you, the good grades will come — maybe not right away, but in good time. To any parents or teachers who might be listening, I’m not telling you to give up on grades. But we need to convey to our students that grades are only a measure of what has been learned and ought not be pursued for their own sake. Remind them that their high school and college point averages are of no significance when they decide to marry, when they raise a family, or even when making important decisions about their worth 20 years into the future. And when the Lord finally brings them into his Kingdom, saying, “Well done, good and faithful servant,” it will not be because of their grade point average.

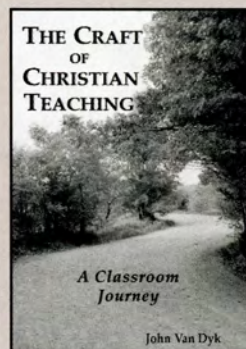
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The Left Hand of God

by Jack Stauder

Dr. Jack Stauder is professor of sociology and cultural anthropology at a state university in the northeastern United States. We have decided to run this fascinating article about teaching religion at a secular university in two parts.

I don't know much about religion. On the topic I mostly know what a cultural anthropologist is supposed to know. But I haven't done any special studies in this field. And I don't have much of a personal religious background. I came from a family where religion was apparently not important and rarely mentioned, though they did trot me off to Sunday School as a boy, and I remember being a little believer up until age twelve. But that belief faded into agnosticism, and throughout my adult life I've been a typical secular university intellectual, not practicing any religion at all.

Nevertheless, I wanted to give a course on religion. In the somewhat laissez-faire academic system of my university this was easily arranged, about a year in advance, when course offerings for the Fall Semester of 2000 were solicited. I simply put myself down to teach a course I invented on the spot, "SOC 352: Religion and Society." The title was deliberately vague to give myself wiggle-room — since at that point I didn't know what it was exactly I would teach about!

My nebulosity was itself part of the reason for wanting to do a course on religion. I long ago discovered that teaching something is the best way to acquire knowledge of it. It gives one the opportunity and imperative to concentrate on learning in order to be prepared to teach. And I wanted to learn more about religion. Several years before, I had taught a course on "Human Nature," an area where anthropology can claim to make a real contribution. Teaching this led to an interest in the subject of

morality and human nature, and I was soon teaching another course I constructed, "Morality and Society." From there it was an obvious step to branch into "Religion and Society." I wanted to go in this direction mainly because I had been greatly impressed by the criticisms of modern culture coming from authors with religious perspectives. In wading through the muck and gore of the battlefields of the Culture Wars, you might say I had stumbled onto the rock of Faith.

My interest in religion also had roots deeper than scholarly curiosity. In recent years, for reasons I hardly comprehend, an inchoate sentiment had slowly formed in my breast that *I should be religious* — I suppose, for the sake of my soul. Being an intellectual, but not overly inclined to philosophical abstractions, I went to books written by Christian writers from a literary perspective, such as C. S. Lewis, G. K. Chesterton, and Malcolm Muggeridge. I sympathetically listened to what they had to say, and was sometimes moved, but I was still advancing at only a snail's pace. My inner life kept resting almost completely within its habitual secular universe, where it had been entrenched over a lifetime. Maybe, I thought, devoting some time to a course on "Religion and Society" would help me out of those trenches.

I envisioned that a course with "religion" in the title would attract some students who were truly religious. They would contribute a lot to the course, as religiously conservative students had occasionally done in my "Morality" courses. Also, I imagined that I could engage in dialogue with them, while at the same time offering a sympathetic forum for free expression of their religious views — an opportunity not available in many college courses.

I didn't want to leave my conception to chance, so in the weeks before registration for the semester of my new course, I took

the additional, unusual step of selectively advertising it. I made up some brightly colored fliers announcing the course by its title and giving a description: "An inquiry into the role of religion in American society. Religious viewpoints on modern culture. Controversies over values and morality between religious and secular worldviews." The flier went on to say, "All students interested in religion are invited to enroll for the coming Fall. No prerequisites. Questions? Contact Prof. Stauder, extension 8400."

I didn't place these fliers just anywhere. I posted them around the rooms in the Campus Center given over to student organizations and, particularly, in the area set aside for religious organizations. In the Catholic Student offices, I found no one but left a tidy little pile of fliers, with a note to give them out to interested students.

During the ensuing summer, I was conducting my usual research in New Mexico — on subjects quite unrelated to religion — while at the same time busily ordering and scanning and reading what books I could in order to discover the best ones for the syllabus of "Religion and Society." I had basically two criteria. First, from long experience teaching, I wanted books written in a clear, accessible style. Undergraduates don't absorb well academic jargon, which is understandable but, unfortunately, they also don't assimilate works that put too much demand on their cultural literacy. Second, I wanted readings that expressed the beliefs and perspectives of traditional, orthodox religion — the Judaeo-Christian tradition that has shaped Western civilization. To my mind increasingly, this tradition provides the most compelling alternative to contemporary secular culture, as well as to the deepest criticisms of modern culture.

I settled on the following required-read-

I had stumbled onto the rock of Faith.

ing — two works by Catholic authors, two by Protestants, and one by a Jew — but all “orthodox.”

Laura Schlessinger, *The Ten Commandments*

J. Budziszewski, *How to Stay Christian in College*

Michael & Jane Novak, *Tell Me Why*

Paul C. Vitz, *Psychology as Religion*

Gene Edward Veith, *Postmodern Times*

In addition, for the last three weeks of the course, I would assign religious periodicals: current issues of *World, First Things* and *The New Oxford Review*, plus whatever other articles I would find interesting at the time.

Course introduction

“SOC 352: Religion and Society” enrolled 20 students — a good number for an upper-level “seminar”-style course held at a not very popular time on Wednesday afternoons.

At our first class meeting, I went over what the course would cover — traditional Jewish and Christian religion in the context of American culture today — and apologized for the too-broad title. I explained it was an experimental course I had never taught before, and that I hoped for an open dia-



logue with the students. I told them that while I was sympathetic to religion, I could not really call myself religious, or a Christian. I was not in fact a “believer,” although to me that constituted a problem, not something I was proud of. This was

actually the truth, but at the time I thought it seemed a convenient truth, since it would reassure students that at least I was an “open-minded” and tolerant professor.

I gave the class a short questionnaire to solicit (anonymously) students’ religious backgrounds and their opinions on some moral questions. We then watched a film in which a Rabbi explained why he believed in God. Afterwards, I tried to encourage discussion by asking each student in turn what he or she thought of the film. Most of the replies were banal and noncommittal. A few students made it plain that they were not believers. One young man, with pale blue eyes so void of emotion his stare discomforted me, explained how he could not believe in anything beyond physical reality. “You’re a materialist, then?” “I guess so,” he replied, in a tone that suggested maybe he didn’t understand the word.

The discussion did not get very far, which is not unusual the first time

classes meet. I adjourned until the following week. What bothered me most, after the class, was the realization that none of the students had spoken up positively regarding faith in God.

Questionnaire info

I hardly knew the students yet, but I did have the questionnaires they had filled out for me. At home that night, I read them and added up their responses. The first question was, "Which religious tradition or church is part of your personal background?" Of the 20 students, 14 answered "Roman Catholicism" — not a surprising portion, since most of the nearby population are descendants of Catholic immigrants — Portuguese, Cape Verdean, Irish, and French-Canadian. One student answered *both* Catholic and Protestant. Another student answered simply "Protestantism," still another was Jewish, another "None." In the "Other (cite)" blank space, one had written "Christian Science," and another, "Militant Atheist"!

The next question was "In what (if any) religious tradition would you like to raise your children?" Here was some bad news for Rome: while the half-Protestant, the full Protestant, the Jew and the Christian Scientist all said they would raise their children in their traditions, only six of the 14 Catholics stated the same. From the whole class, seven students replied, "None," one "unsure," one "leave it to them" (to the children — no "raising" there!), one "Unitarian," and one "vehement Atheism" — this was the "Militant Atheist," of course, displaying a fervent commitment most of the Catholics couldn't muster.

Moral relativism

The answers to the questions on moral issues were even more depressing to me as one who had wanted to engage religiously committed students. Not one student believed premarital sex was "morally wrong." No one believed sexual intercourse "should be reserved for marriage." Eight thought it "acceptable only if the couple are committed and in love," leaving a majority of 12 saying sex is "acceptable be-

tween any two consenting adults."

Only one student thought homosexuality was wrong. Only two, divorce. Only four out of the class thought "euthanasia" is wrong (although it's quite possible some didn't understand the term). Only six of the 20 thought abortion to be morally wrong — though five of those six would approve of abortion in cases of rape or incest, leaving only one saying the practice is "always wrong."

Having administered similar questionnaires in previous "Morality" courses, I knew that the typical student at my campus doesn't adhere to a very demanding standard of morality. However, by comparison my "Religion" course seemed especially skewed towards sexual liberalism and irreligiosity — certainly not what I had expected or wished for. I wondered: had I succeeded in attracting to my course mainly students with an axe to grind *against* traditional religion?

My disappointment was compounded during the next class meeting. Not by the Militant Atheist, who turned out to be a cheery young male easily identifiable by his T-shirt logo of the Cross being crossed out by the international stop-sign signal. He explained that it was the emblem of his favorite rock band, "Bad Religion," which apparently specializes in attacks on Christianity. Subsequently in his papers for the course, the Militant Atheist would quote the band's lyrics as if they were great wisdom.

Judgmental responses

No, it wasn't the Militant Atheist who bothered me so much as the others in class who spoke out during our first real discussion. Our first book was Dr. Laura's *The Ten Commandments*. Written with the advice of a rabbi, her book combines orthodox exegesis with the moral criticism of modern society that has made her fa-

mous. Certainly my students knew her reputation, and the ones who spoke out seemed eager to go on record as condemning her. I wondered how much of this was due to the ongoing gay activist campaign attempting unfairly to portray her as a bigot. At any rate, these students were quite intolerant of her "intolerance," and judged her harshly for being "judgmental."

In attacking her, moreover, they did not disagree with the main moral principles she puts forward; instead, they tended to come up with secondary points where they thought they could detect inconsistency. Why, how could she justify the death penalty historically, when the commandment says you shall not kill, etc. (despite her going into a long explanation of how the accurate translation is "murder"). More than one student was outraged at her condemnation of gossip as hurtful, as character assassination similar to "killing." And so on. This (unconscious?) tactic of seizing on smaller issues rather than confronting the larger ones in order to condemn and discredit an author, would become dishearteningly familiar as the semester wore on.

In responding to my students' comments, I inaugurated what would be another trend in the course. Feeling the need to defend my authors against unfair criticism and obtuse interpretation, I began to explain and justify religious orthodoxy. I felt forced into this role because no students were standing up against the barrage of antinomian and counter-cultural attacks on traditional religion and morality loosed by the irreligious students in class.

Silent sufferer

There were in fact a few religious students in the course, as I discovered, not from class discussions but, instead, in the

Cont'd on page 28

Thinking Thirteen

The Room You Desire

by Nancy Knol

Nancy Knol teaches English and religion at Grand Rapids Christian High. She is co-author of the Book Reaching and Teaching Young Adolescents.

One of my favorite authors is Frederick Buechner. In a thoughtful book he wrote some time ago, he tells of an unusual dream he had. In the dream he stayed at a hotel in a particularly lovely room. He says that he doesn't remember many of the details about the room, except that when he was there he felt "happy and at peace, where everything seemed the way it should be too...." Then, still dreaming, he returned for another visit and came back to the same hotel. But this time his room was not at all pleasant. So he went down to the desk clerk and explained that he wanted the room he had stayed in previously. The clerk said that "he knew exactly the room I meant and that I could have it again anytime I wanted it. All I had to do was ask for it by its name." And as it turns out, the name of the room he desired was: Remember.

Remembering is at the core of what makes life meaningful. It's why some people are so fond of photographs — the moment is captured, and you can go back to it and at least partially remember what this moment was like.

A former middle-school student of mine once wrote this poem, called "Photograph":

*Crazy what
one second and
pressing buttons
can do....
Capturing life,
capturing beauty, love, wonder
on one glossy sheet:
colors, life,
and you.
First tooth,
baby fat,
how long my hair was,
Grandma's last birthday party ...
Remember our old dog?
Such memories hold the
image and keep it alive.
That falling leaf never really
touched the ground.
That snowman never really melted.*



Nancy Knol
Column Editor
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When I used to teach eighth-grade Bible, I asked my students to draw what Frederick Buechner called "A Room Called Remember." The idea behind the assignment was that you pretend you have a room where you would put all those things or people or even words that were important in shaping you. The finished products always amazed me.

One girl drew a variety of people wandering about in her room, and then in one closet she had a picture of a very old lady. This was a lady she hardly knew — she lived down the street from her, and she had encountered her only once, but that one encounter left such a sweet impression on her that she had to include her in some obscure part of her room. Other students' rooms included things like trophies and ribbons, a worn and dirty baby blanket, sports equipment, musical instruments, books, an easel ... some of them even had tombstones. And one that I recall had dark little clouds over each thing she drew because she had suffered from depression for a long time in her childhood before it was diagnosed and treated.

I share this in order to get all of us thinking about two things, really. The first is to ask ourselves what our students will remember about the time they spent with us. What are the lasting impressions we have given them? How have we equipped them? The second is to ponder our own middle school years. If someone asked you to draw a "Room called Remember" of your middle-school experiences, what would you put in that room? I am sad to say that many of the things I would place in that room would be unpleasant and painful. But remembering has helped me make some unspoken promises to my students about what will *not* be

in my classroom.

Buechner asked the question: "To what end and purpose are we to remember?" I think one purpose is to make us a little wiser, a little more emphatic as we make memories together.





It's all about *authenticity,* folks

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 email her at valstar@telusplanet.net

Too much help hinders

Question #1

I successfully applied for a grant which benefits our school, my students and me as a teacher. The application required detailed answers as to how I would use the grant and how I would implement a program if I were successful. When another school asked for help in applying for the same grant, I encouraged them, offering specific suggestions including key themes I knew to be important in the granting agency's mission. I offered to review the answers and give constructive feedback, but did not give a copy of my answers because I felt in some way that would be "cheating." They accepted my decision. However, one of my colleagues felt it would have been "common courtesy" to share my answers with a smaller Christian school. What do you feel about my reaction to the situation?

Response:

I can understand your colleague's sentiments to a certain degree because smaller Christian schools often lack the resources and personnel to put together a grant application. Sometimes they are just busy surviving. What a blessing that you were willing to give the specific suggestions and review their application.

I can appreciate your point of view because the application required the applicant to submit how he or she would implement a program. That would require a degree of expertise in the teacher's curriculum area, in knowing what was needed to set up the program, in actually implementing the program, and then following through on the program evaluation. Had the smaller school borrowed extensively from your answers, the teacher may have run into problems in implementing the program.

I trust that by working through the grant application on their own, both the school and the teacher clarified what they wanted for their school, and determined whether or not the school could support the new program. The teacher received value by determining how the program would benefit herself and her students and how she would implement the program.

A teacher cannot duplicate someone else's plans. In a sense this can be compared to teachers using someone else's unit plan. Teachers can follow the basic outline, but they have to adapt the unit for themselves and their students. So, too, with this application. If the teacher of the smaller school used your plan, it may not work because the students, the school community and the teacher are all different. Since the application and grant approval was contingent on an individual teacher indicating how he or she would design and carry out a specific program, I support you in the action taken.

Open communication, please

Question # 2

I am disheartened because of what appears to be unethical practices on the part of a school board. A senior teacher has not had a contract renewed and no reason has been given. I am aware that this school's enrollment for the coming year has decreased. There seems to be mistrust in the Christian community. Do you have any comment or encouragement?

Response:

Sadly, what you have described happens far too frequently in our Christian School communities. What is necessary in situations such as you have described is open communication. Sometimes this does not happen because of fear. "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment" (1 John 4: 18).

Operating in the spirit of love and understanding, open communication can occur before action is taken, and unnecessary hurt can be avoided. Together staff, administration, education committee and board may be able to find a solution. Reality indicates that reduced enrollment means a reduction on the receipts side of the budget. A senior teacher is likely one of the highest paid staff members and, therefore, increases the expenditure side of the budget. If one were to look only at the financial facts, reducing the expenses by eliminating a highly paid teacher would make sense. If, however, one were to consider the value that an experienced teacher may bring to teaching and to the school as a whole, value may be considered in terms of expertise, stability, and mentoring — qualities to which a monetary figure cannot be ascribed.

Many teachers sign a yearly contract, and, although it may be perceived to be unethical for a board to fail to renew the contract, I have been told, it is legal. A board, acting responsibly,



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will seek legal advice before actions such as this are taken. Board members are in a difficult position when these situations occur and likely do not relish having to take these actions.

I hope and pray that in this and similar situations, reconciliation and forgiveness can occur by the power of the Holy Spirit. We seek to have our schools and our employment practices be a witness of fair and just action, giving praise to God.

Authentically Christian

Question # 3

We often ask ourselves, "How do we make our teaching Christian? How do we bring our faith commitment across without sounding trite?"

Response:

This is a question which does not have one easy answer. Making our teaching Christian has as much to do with how we teach as it has to do with what we teach in keeping with the vision we have for Christian education. Because of space limitations, I will address briefly only what we teach.

We must acknowledge with Dr. Al Greene that all of God's creation is the content of the curriculum we teach (1998, p. 151). Whether it is the "stuff" of creation, or the norms or laws which govern the creation, both past and present, we are dealing with our relationship with God, others and the creation.

When writing the overview or thematic statement of our unit plans, we can clearly state how we intend to teach the unit from a Christian perspective. The thematic statement "contains the key ideas that frame a unit's teaching and learning," "describes the overall intents" and "indicates the main values, dispositions and commitments you want to foster" (Van Brummelen, 1994, p. 214). This, however, has to be translated into classroom teaching. We do not want our students to say of us, "The only time my teacher said anything 'Christian' was when she introduced the unit." Writing the thematic statement helps teachers clarify their intent and keep the Christian focus in the forefront.

As a seasoned teacher indicated, even though he writes the units, he has to constantly look for teachable moments when the awe, power and majesty of the Creator can be an authentic part of teaching. Questions students ask are often opportune moments. This teacher pointed out that upon reflection, he may realize he has not consciously given praise to God or verbally acknowledged God in regard to the unit content in the last few lessons. He will, therefore, remind himself to look for

opportunities. To stand in awe of the Creator and to give praise and honor to God need not be considered trite by Christian teachers.

Rather than taking it for granted, we are privileged to have the opportunity to acknowledge God in thankfulness, aware that we are his creatures called to serve him and others. In so doing, "we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done" (Psalm 78:4b).

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Christian Learning Center

The Jesus of Islam

by Paul Serwinek

Paul Serwinek teaches anthropology and lives in Milford, Michigan.

It all started when I asked my college Cultural Anthropology Class to do some research on the major differences between Christian Thought and Islamic tenets. With Islam in the news like never before, I thought it a worthwhile exercise. Little did I realize the buzz I would cause. This academic exercise provided a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the unsurpassed message found in Christianity.

My students first discovered many complementary beliefs held by the two great religions. Students noted the common religious heritage shared, going back to the Abrahamic promise in Genesis. Islam, in fact, still venerates the Old Testament prophets and still observes many of the rituals and dietary practices. Students were nonplussed to discover Islam even recognizes Jesus, born of a virgin, as a special prophet of God. Furthermore, they anticipate the return of Jesus in harmony with the New Testament promise.

I next asked students, some of whom hope to be future missionaries, how they would witness to a Muslim and, further, what minimally needs to be accepted to become a Christian. Again, since many beliefs were so similar (Muslims believe in the need for forgiveness from an all-loving omnipotent Father, the existence of an invisible Satan etc.) why is there a difficulty in accepting Christianity? The class concluded there was one major difference, in addition to the cultural differences, which are less religious and more societal. Alas, Islam is more ritualistic and more insistent on keeping

the old traditions than Christians might be. However, students concluded the major difficulty, of course, is the acceptance of Jesus as the Son of God and the need for the ransom sacrifice. All else, the class tended to agree, were issues of traditional, ritual and individualistic interpretation.

I then told my class about my own personal dialog with Muslims who assess Jesus as a prophet from God, inspired no less than Abraham, Elijah and men of God of the Biblical Old Testament. These beliefs, I've always found, provide common

need to come as a man to do this. If He decrees you're absolved of sin, nothing else is needed. Isn't God's word good enough? Well, isn't it?" They press. I have to admit, "Yes, of course".

However, I reason, accepting Jesus as only a prophet misses a new and unique revolutionary aspect of God. The God Christians have come to know didn't just say, "You're forgiven", he demonstrably and indelibly proved it in a way words could never express. It's one thing for God (Allah) to say, "I love you so much I'll forgive you. I'm love, don't you worry."

It's still another to demonstrate this forgiveness by suffering and dying for us to prove by actions the veracity of his words.

I mention, from personal experience, here is why that is so important. The problem is this, and I speak for anyone who has acted as a Christian counselor or as a bearer of Good News, we encounter individuals so despondent as to feel their situations are hopeless. Especially for these, certain their deeds are so infamous as to be impossible to forgive, Jesus died. Because Jesus died for all instead of just saying, "You're forgiven", I could say to a despondent questioner, "What you did may be worthy of death, I agree, but don't you see? Jesus did this for you! What more graphic proof do you need that His proclamation of freedom to start over is available to you too? We've all consoled individuals who felt beyond repair. To

these, the only realization that could get through was the picture of Jesus' personal sacrifice. To themselves what they perceive they had done was so heinous as to deserve the worst conceivable punishment. And then they hear that Jesus, a person not



Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael

ground between us, a starting point. But the argument of Islam is this. "Allah is a God of love. As a God of love he forgives His subjects. As any loving father would forgive a contrite child begging for forgiveness, Allah will forgive. Our Allah has no

from this world, knew there would be individuals like them, so inconsolable that he offered to take their place by enduring the most agonizing punishment possible. Only then do they realize hope is possible for them personally.

So in reply to Muslims I can explain, "I agree God could have just forgiven us and that should be enough. And it is gratifying to know that God went beyond words by giving each of us a vivid portrayal of his love and forgiveness. God, in His wisdom, conceived a way to prove beyond any question and to all that when He says, 'You're forgiven,' He really means it."

I also informed my class about some research I had done, as a sociologist, into forgiveness. The scientific literature is now replete with studies that demonstrate what a powerful force for psychological well-being forgiveness is, for both the forgiver and the forgiven. So armed with both first-hand experiences that only the knowledge of Jesus' suffering and death was powerful enough to get through to some and now with abundant scientific research confirmation of the power and necessity of forgiveness, I can argue why the Christian forgiveness scenario is so necessary.

Presenting these experiences to my students has, I hope, helped them to perceive the wondrous privilege they have of proclaiming the difference between Christianity and a perfunctory belief in a loving God. My hope is these students will have many opportunities to reason with Muslims as to why the God, the Allah whom Christians have come to know, is more loving than they may have conceived, and that the prophet Jesus they are acquainted with is much more than they have perceived. Recent events on the world stage, I believe, will allow for more opportunity to dialog with Muslims than we ever anticipated.

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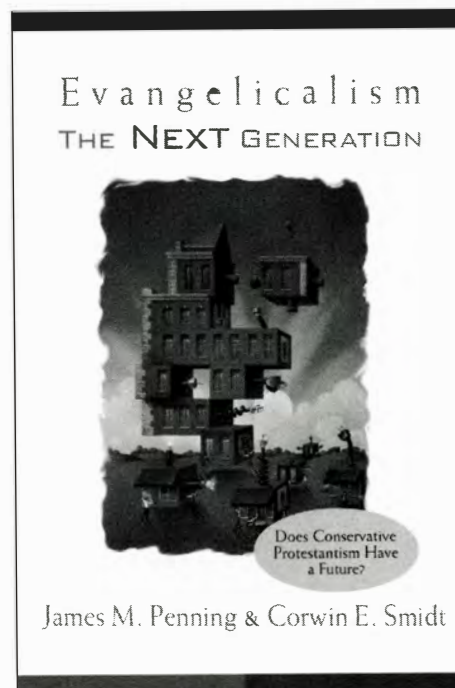
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How We Eliminated Swearing in Our School

by Marilyn D. Brenden

Marilyn D. Brenden has retired after 22 years of teaching middle-school students. She likes to write about Christian education issues and other ministry concerns. Readers can contact her at marilynbr@iwon.com.

I had seldom noticed it before cable TV service came into widespread use in our city. But as the years passed by, the level of swearing in the middle school where I was teaching kept steadily increasing. Previously I'd occasionally hear some random swearing in the halls. But now the use of profane language had become so common in the hallways that it was impossible not to notice it every day. Even worse, the practice was also beginning to spread into the classroom.

The first time swearing occurred in class, I explained to the students that it was an unacceptable thing in my classroom. But the behavior didn't change. Furthermore, the offenders scoffed at the guidance. As one student said, "That's just your idea. Mine's different. My folks let me use these words at home. If it's O.K.

with them, what's it to you?" Other teachers were getting similar taunting feedback from their students.

To make matters worse, the swearing was only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the discipline problems we were having. Pushing, hitting and scuffling in the halls were common behaviors, and derogatory names for students and staff were scribbled on the lavatory walls and occasionally even spray-painted on the building.

What had once been an enjoyable teaching situation in a moderate-size school was now an unpleasant, stressful environment. Kids were sick of being called names, and the teachers were weary of dealing with problems generated by inappropriate language. Yet, working alone, nothing seemed to improve the school climate.

New broom

The next fall a new principal arrived at the school. In assessing the needs of our building, he asked what the major recurring problems were. Unanimously, the staff agreed that our greatest challenge

was the lax discipline in the school. While discussing the predicament, the staff again and again pointed to the rowdy hall behavior and especially to the swearing problem which seemed to provoke much of the disruption.


From that discussion, we developed a three-step plan that eliminated most of the swearing in our school.

First, the teachers clearly defined the difference between appropriate and inappropriate language in public settings. We explained that the use of disrespectful references to God, words related to damnation, and slang terms for excretory functions and sexual activities were socially inappropriate.

Secondly, in the classroom, the staff adopted a zero tolerance level for improper language. At the first instance of swearing, the teacher would write down the student's indecent remark on a slip of paper, and then send the pupil to the office for follow-up discipline.

The third step involved both counseling and discipline. On the student's first visit to the office, the principal would determine if the student understood the meaning of the words he or she had used. (Often they didn't.) Then he would explain the difference between appropriate and inappropriate language just as the staff had done earlier, making sure the student clearly understood. He concluded the disciplinary session by spelling out what would happen if the student appeared in the office again.

If the student was removed from the classroom a second time, the principal had the student phone his or her parents wherever they might happen to be at the time, either at home or at work. The students were required to inform their par-

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ents what they had done, and what they had said, using the exact words spoken.

Then the principal would talk to the parent. He'd advise the parent that the child had engaged in swearing behavior previously, detail what the consequences would be if the child repeated the behavior again, and ask for the parent's support in helping to resolve the problem.

Only a few students made that third visit to the office. But for those who did, an immediate three-day suspension from school was imposed.



Within six week's time the profanity was almost eliminated from our school, and other behaviors began to improve as well. Evidently the swearing and name-calling had been at the root of much of the conflict between the young people. As the quality of the language improved in the school, respect for both students and teachers returned as well.

Thus, by working together as a staff, we restored order to our school and were freed to focus our attention once again upon the fulfilling challenge of equipping and encouraging young learners.

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GREAT WITH CHILD

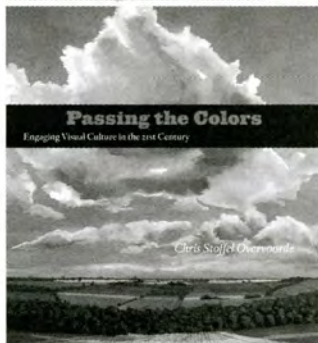
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Slouching Toward Bedlam

Mission for Measure

or

Muck Aho about Test Scores

by Jan Kaarsvlam

Jan Kaarsvlam is pleased to announce that he has accepted the position of assistant music teacher at Byron Center Christian Middle School. Jan lost his position as director of the new Fine Arts Facility at Ripon Christian after he had booked Abba, Judas Priest, and Black Sabbath for the first three chapels of the year, under the unfortunate impression that all three of them were Christian bands. The board requested his resignation.

"Who is responsible for this?" roared Bedlam principal Bently Vanderhaar. He held up the plaque of the school's mission statement that hung by the gym. The plaque was supposed to read:

BCHS aims to graduate
Biblically grounded students who are
Challenged by a call to serve in
His kingdom, and in so doing transform
Society, church and home.

With some deletions and adjustments, made with a permanent marker, the sign now read:

BS aims to graduate
Biblically challenged
Students who call a grounded transformer home.

As various teachers craned their necks to read the plaque, Rex Kane, Bedlam's enigmatic gym teacher, gave it a cursory glance before ducking his head in the refrigerator and digging for a can of Coke. As he emerged, he said, "Oh yeah, I saw that in the hallway. Pretty clever, huh?"

"This is not clever!" Vanderhaar shouted. "It's vandalism."

"But it's *clever* vandalism," Rex answered. He patted Vanderhaar sympathetically on the shoulder, and then crossed to take a seat next to his friend Gord Winkle, the shop teacher, who was ignoring the plaque and Vanderhaar's cries of frustration, and focusing all his attention on the Snickers bar he had just pulled out of his pocket. He was attempting to show Rex how, by making just one cut about two-thirds of the way along the candy bar with an ordinary table knife, he could get the entire Snickers inside his mouth at once.

"No one knows who did this?" Vanderhaar said again, this time sounding less angry and more desperate. No one answered. In fact, the teachers were (alone or in groups) in the process of creating their own mock versions of the mission statement. Carrie Wellema and Cal Vandermeer were the first to finish.

"How 'bout this one?" Carrie said to the group, "BCHS aims to ground students by a call home."

"Or this," said Cal, "BCHS aims to serve ground-up students

in a graduated flask."

A chorus of chuckles rose. A slight red began to color the wattles that swung beneath Vanderhaar's chin.

And then Christina Lopez said, "Not bad, but listen as the English Department weighs in: "BCHS grades are challenged to serve SAT scores."

Vanderhaar turned beet red. Lopez's mission statement had been a calculated attack on the principal's most recent memo emphasizing test scores. The average SAT score for Bedlam's students had been in a slight decline for the past five years. Vanderhaar had noticed. So had the school board, which had begun to put pressure on him about the worsening student performance.

Winkle tried to say something, but the candy bar trapped his tongue. He managed to mutter something vaguely reassuring. Rex chimed in for his verbally preoccupied buddy, "Aw, c'mon Christina, don't kick a man when he's down. Bently's got enough to worry about without this kid going around cleverly vandalizing plaques."

"Hey," Vanderhaar interrupted him, "I'm not so thin-skinned. If anyone here wants to talk about my response to the declining test scores, I'd be glad to discuss the matter."

Vanderhaar's response to the declining test scores was to have every department study the part of the SAT test that applied to them and discuss how they could change the curriculum, the testing practices, or both in their department to better prepare students for the SAT. Vanderhaar had hoped that Lopez, being a newer teacher, would back down from his bluff. Unfortunately for him, she did not.

"Well," she said with a smile, "since you asked, I have no objection to your addressing the problem of test scores. I think we all agree that something has to be done. I guess I have a problem with the way you are choosing to address that problem."

Vanderhaar tried to stay calm, but the red that had started under his chin had crept up his face, over his balding head, and was now coloring the back of his neck. "Young lady, if you agree with me that the test scores are a problem, how would you suggest that we address the problem, if not by addressing test scores?"

"It seems to me we ought to be trying to give our students the best overall education we can, test or no test," Lopez stated calmly.

Bently Vanderhaar opened his mouth to speak, but before he could say anything, art teacher Gregg Mortis jumped in. "Those tests don't even measure some of the most important things — like compassion, or kindness, or how much a student believes in

God.”

“Say, Mortis, I didn’t know your ‘How-to-Draw’ videos taught any of that either,” Rex said, a grin spreading across his face as he dug into Winkle’s ribs with his elbow to make sure Winkle got the joke. Winkle laughed, sending a single caramel-coated peanut dribbling down his chin. He wiped at it with the back of his meaty hand.

“Those are great things, Greg, but how are we supposed to...” Vanderhaar began before Cal Vandermeer cut him off.

“And what makes us think that the college testing board or the state, or whoever administers those things, is looking for the same thing we are in a student. I mean, come on, I

thought we were supposed to be different from all the public schools. Why can’t we just say we don’t care what those tests say and concentrate on making our students the best we can?”

“Now listen...” Vanderhaar said. This time Gordon Winkle tried to cut him off but began choking on his Snickers bar. Rex swiftly maneuvered behind him and did the Heimlich. The Snickers flew out of Winkle’s open mouth, halfway across the room, and into the sink. Rex raised his arms in a victorious gesture. Everyone looked at Bedlam’s resident clowns for a moment, then continued the discussion.

“Now listen,” repeated Vanderhaar, “this is all fine and good, but the bottom line is, we need to be accountable. Parents pay a lot of money to send their kids here. We are expected to give them a better education than they get up the street. If our kids can’t pass the SATs, I think the parents on the board have got a legitimate gripe.”

“Very true,” said physics teacher Zelda Roberts. Vanderhaar sighed deeply. Finally someone was coming to his defense. “Besides,” Roberts continued, “you all act as if it is the SAT’s measured material we don’t care about. Frankly, if we don’t, we’d better start caring about it. If these tests reveal that our kids don’t read well, have limited vocabularies, and cannot do basic math, then how can any of you argue that we are preparing them for fruitful lives in the service of the Kingdom?”



Christina Lopez wasn’t ready to back down, even if Roberts, arguably one of Bedlam’s best teachers, and one of its most strong-minded, was taking Vanderhaar’s side. “I am not disputing that we need to try harder to improve what we teach and the ways we teach, but it seems to me that we ought to be looking at the bigger picture: how can we help them learn more, not how can we teach to the test. After all, think about our mission statement.” Vanderhaar glanced down at the defaced plaque. The faculty began to giggle. Lopez held up her hand for silence and got it. She went on. “We say we want our students to

transform society, church, and home. Doesn’t that imply that we have to look at things a little differently?”

“Your argument hangs on a false dilemma,” Roberts retorted with a visible lack of patience. “Either we have a transformative school or we try to do well on the standardized tests — false dilemma. Don’t they teach logic in college composition anymore?”

Now Lopez’s brown eyes turned fiery, and her face flushed with anger. Vanderhaar was about to step in and attempt to restore civility when the door opened and Biff Knot walked in. The youngest member of the faculty, Biff’s room was on the other end of the building, and it took him forever to get to the staff room. His walking in usually signaled the end of break was fast approaching. Rex, who had been writing furiously on a napkin ever since his Heimlich three-pointer, seized the floor.

“Okay, listen up. I wrote one too. Here’s my version of the mission statement:

BCHS aims Bibles at the ground to call churches and home in on a transformed king who is serving society by sewing challenges into our students.” Rex finished with a flourish and another triumphant grin. Vanderhaar frowned, Lopez shook her head, Biff looked very confused, and poor Gordon Winkle kept trying to wash the chocolate spittle out of his tie as the bell summoned them back to class.

Playing Games in Social Studies

by Daniel R. Miller

Daniel Miller is supervisor of History Secondary Education training at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. In addition to supervising student teachers and leading a seminar on Methods of Secondary Instruction in History, he teaches courses on Mexico, Latin America, United States History, the West and the World, and Third World Development.

We've all heard the proverb: "I hear — I forget; I see — I remember; I do — I understand." One of the best ways I've found to "do" Social Studies is to play games that replicate a historical situation or illustrate an important Social Studies idea. Games give my students some variety and, when well designed and properly presented, provide powerful learning experiences that are remembered long after lectures and discussions have been forgotten.

A few definitions are in order. I distinguish games from competitive exercises such as "Jeopardy" or other quiz-show type activities that teachers sometimes use to review information. Such activities are different from the games I have in mind in at least two ways. First, their format has nothing to do with the subject matter (unless the subject of the day is the culture of television). Second, they encourage students to memorize specific information, a useful goal at times, but very different from the complex learning promoted by well-constructed educational games.

I also distinguish games from simulations. Games have clear rules that narrowly define the choices students can make, and these choices generally lead to measurable consequences. Simulations are more open-ended. They rely on students to understand their roles and to stay in character. Simulations work best when students already know enough about the situation being portrayed to speak and act in appropriate

ways. By contrast, games require little prior knowledge other than familiarity with the rules. Simulations can offer a creative way to bring closure to a unit. Games can provide an exciting introduction to a topic or an enrichment experience along the way.

The benefits of using games in the classroom are obvious. My classes are full of energy on days when we play a game. Most students have no trouble paying attention. Competition against other students or just the chance to "score points" is a powerful motivator for some, though by no means all, students. Games that require students to work in teams or coordinate moves with others help them to develop negotiating skills.

All of the games I use require strategic thinking. Players have to evaluate the results of their last move while they plan their next one. While supervising such games, I often see students, even at the college level, who lack the ability to distinguish between sensible strategies and those that hold little hope of success. It makes me wonder whether we, as teachers, give our students too few opportunities to develop reasoning and decision-making abilities. Well-designed games are an excellent way to do this.

The greatest benefit of using games is that they promote authentic and holistic learning. When I teach colonial American history, I use a game that simulates the mid-eighteenth century "triangle trade" in the north Atlantic. As they play, students learn the names and locations of several Caribbean ports, they realize how important weather was to trade patterns, and they develop an unhappy familiarity with the Navigation and Trade Acts, all without my having to say anything.

I use a railroad game to illustrate laissez-faire economics as it was practiced in the late nineteenth century. Students don't get any start up money; they sell stock which

requires them to pay regular dividends. They quickly learn that running a business is not just about making profits; it's also about paying bills.

Through trial and error, students develop the same strategies that were used by "robber barons" a century ago. They compete mercilessly (and ruinously), conspire to fix prices, and gain control over rivals by buying up their stock.

By game's end, students have no trouble understanding such complex notions as stock ownership, collusion, monopolistic pricing, and hostile takeovers. In the debriefing session afterward, we consider how their actions as company managers might have been perceived by consumers or how they might have affected railroad workers. We also discuss why federal and state governments were called upon to intervene in the economy. Our shared memory of events that occurred during the game provides wonderful illustrations as students consider these issues.

This past January, my Civil War class played a game that depicts a military campaign. Two teams moved military units on separate boards, out of sight of each other. Their respective commanders sat at the back of the room directing overall strategy, but they had to depend on subordinates to carry out their wishes.

Students quickly realized that maneuvers that appeared simple on the maps in their textbook could be very difficult to carry out. Crucial decisions had to be made without full knowledge of the enemy's whereabouts. Mistakes in carrying out orders, or new information which made orders appear unworkable, taught the students much about the "friction" that attends all complex human undertakings. There were lots of surprises, and both teams quickly found that they had to scrap their initial plans and improvise new ones.

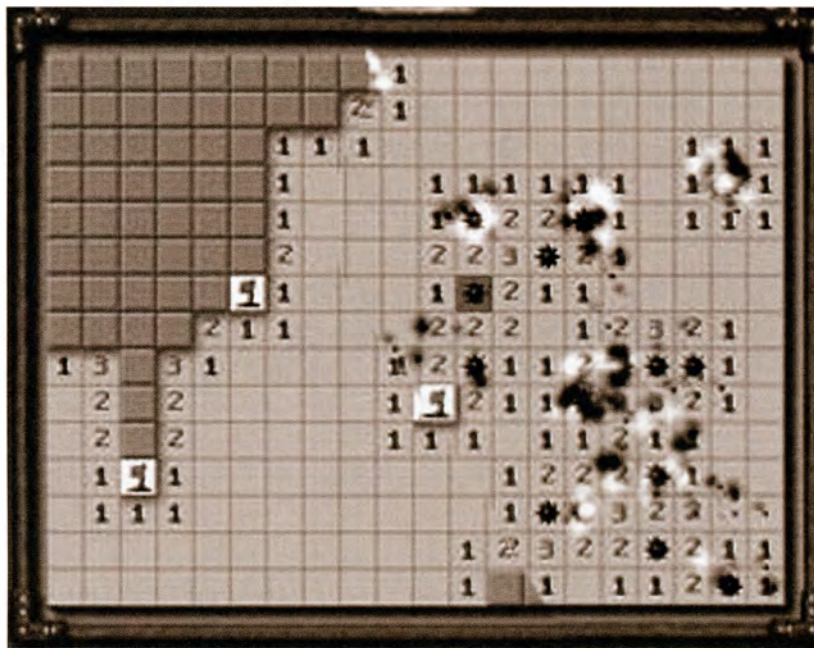
The game also subverted gender stereo-

types. Boys who assumed they knew more about how to conduct a battle found they had no special advantage. Meanwhile, girls who had no prior interest in military affairs got caught up in the problem-solving aspects of the game and found that they could make perfectly sensible decisions.

Anyone who has used games in a classroom setting knows that there are drawbacks to them. For one, they can be very time-consuming. I designed each of the games described above and can attest that if I hadn't worked on them largely for fun, I probably would never have completed them. It simply takes too much time to work out all the bugs. Even a purchased game requires time, so always play it first at home with the aid of a spouse, children, or anyone else who can be imposed upon so that you can anticipate problems and make plans to deal with them.

Games can take a lot of class time too. Students must learn the rules and they often proceed very slowly while they are figuring out what to do. As with any method, the teacher must do a cost-benefit analysis to decide whether the amount and quality of learning promoted is worth the teacher's and the class's time.

Related to the question of cost effectiveness is the issue of merit. All games simplify and distort reality. Poorly designed ones purvey misinformation. The teacher has to ask whether the realistic elements outweigh the distortions. Age appropriateness must also be considered. The moral stance of the game is another concern. Does a military simulation trivialize war? Does a game about economic competition glorify greed? These are serious concerns, but they aren't so different from those we face



when we think about showing a video or assigning a novel.

Perhaps the biggest drawback is the very competitive spirit that makes them exciting to students. Students may argue about the rules, getting more caught up in the game than the reality it portrays. They may get upset at teammates who disagree with them on strategy or at rival players. My classes inevitably get noisier when we play a game, which is fine for more aggressive students but may be distressing to quieter, more rule-oriented students.

And what about losing? Some students go bankrupt or see their military units captured. The teacher must have a plan to deal with them practically (do they just watch from then on?) and emotionally, because some students take their game fates quite seriously.

This brings us to the role of the teacher. The teacher should have a clear idea of what her role will be, whether it's to keep score or settle disputes or monitor compliance with the rules. She may need to devise an easy record keeping system if the game extends beyond a single class period. One of the hardest decisions to make is whether or not to advise students who are making poor choices. It's tempting to play favorites at such times, but it goes without saying that such behavior is both unfair and unwise.

The teacher should also debrief the class after a game. I never assume that students "got the point." Even less do I suggest that the game was a pleasant interruption but now it's time to go back to "real learning." I ask students what happened during the game and how it relates to the real situations that the game was supposed to

reflect.

Sometimes the frustrations a student feels at the results of a game can be an important part of the experience. It's not much fun to go bankrupt in a game, but what about real life? We tend to focus our attention on the economic aspects of the market, but what about its emotional and psychological effects?

It's also wise to ask students where the game reflects real life accurately and where it distorts reality. When a game is well designed and properly integrated into the curriculum, I can refer to the students' game experience to illustrate topics that come up long afterward.

What makes games so memorable? They are a form of experiential learning, they promote higher-level thinking, they convey a richer understanding of concepts than most lectures or even videos can convey, and they're fun. They appeal to the whole person — intellectually, emotionally, visually, and so on. Christians in particular should not be surprised to find that such a holistic approach can be so effective. "I hear — I forget; I see — I remember; I do — I understand."

If you would like to discuss the use of classroom games in general or would like to ask me about any of the games described in this article, write me at my e-mail address: mill@calvin.edu.

The Left Hand of God Continued from page 16

three-page papers I had students writing regularly to respond personally to the readings. Especially religious was the oldest student in class, a man with gray hair and a limp, a “returning student,” as we classify them. He was a Marine Corps veteran, and apparently the part Catholic, part Protestant of the questionnaire. He had been raised in a Protestant household but schooled and converted by nuns, had married and divorced a Catholic woman during a messed-up period of his life, and on re-marriage converted back to a charismatic Protestant sect.

He was ferociously devout in his written opinions and in conversations with me after class, but, unless called on directly, he wouldn’t speak out in class. When later in the course he finally did openly and movingly profess his faith and the life experiences that had led him to it, what he had to say was politely passed over by the skeptics in the class, who did not want to discuss it.

This Devout Veteran, as I will call him, confided to me after one class that he would like to strangle the cheerful Militant Atheist who sat near him. I think the Veteran was frustrated because he did not feel articulate enough to counter the bright and glib assertions of the Atheist. But I reminded the Veteran that, after all, the Atheist at least took religion seriously, even if in a totally negative way, and there might be some unconscious reason why he was in this class. A rather lame suggestion, but it mollified the Devout Veteran, and had at least the advantage of being a better alternative than strangulation for him to contemplate.

Muffled witness

Another student with religion was a young black woman with a radiant cast to her face, soft-spoken and usually quiet in class. She was the other Protestant — a

preacher’s daughter, she disclosed in her paper. She disagreed with the moral relativism that so easily streamed out of the talkers in class: “It is only because of my acceptance of an objective morality from God that my emotions (however unstable) can be monitored, gauged, and kept in check. Without this acceptance my life, and I’m sure the lives of many others like me, ~~would be a hellish roller coaster~~ from which there was no getting off.”

But she would save such remarks for her papers; in class, she was absolutely non-combative.

Two other students, Catholic, and from their accents apparently raised in Portugal, also disclosed their faith in their papers, but again remained mostly silent or muffled in class.

Dislikes convictions

Therefore the majority of the students who rejected traditional religion continually had the floor, and I constantly had to engage in dialogue with *them*. In addition to defending orthodoxy in the classroom — in the most dispassionate, measured professorial manner that I could — I also found myself forced to uphold it when I encountered the opinions of the majority in their three-page papers.

It was frustrating work. For example, take this gem from the paper of a blank-faced young man of the kind who wears his baseball cap in class:

The main reason why I dislike [Dr. Laura’s] book is because I feel that the translation of the Ten Commandments is a subjective progress that each individual should come up with on his or her own. Furthermore, I don’t believe anyone is capable, or should have the nerve, to claim that they have the correct and non-negotiable answer to something that has been debated about since the time of the pharaohs.

In other words, anyone who believes in

something and tells another is arrogant and dislikable. My scribbled reply in the margins: “Gee, she was just expressing the views that her Jewish religion has developed over several thousand years — is it wrong for her to tell you what these views are?”

Other people’s garbage

However, the Baseball-Capped Postmodernist was reasonable compared to the student I will call the Depressed Feminist, due to her gloomy demeanor and her papers filled with unhappy comments. She would rarely express positive feelings about anything. However, I can appreciate why she wasn’t cheered up reading what Dr. Laura has to say about abortion and counter-cultural feminism in general. Here is one of her reactions:

“What [Dr. Laura] really is, is a conservative stick-in-the-mud, who has lost touch with the realities of today’s world. If our culture reverted back to her strict moral code, we would be a repressed and fearful people.... It is simply because of our society’s lack of true separation of church and state, and ingrained Puritan ideas, that garbage like her show is permitted to be a part of regular network programming.”

Do I get this right? Dr. Laura should not be permitted to have a radio or TV show because she’s a conservative and supports religion-based morality? The same Depressed Feminist, in class discussion and in her papers, was fond of charging Dr. Laura and other religious conservatives with “intolerance.”

My measured and dispassionate reasoning with this woman over the semester bore no fruit; to the end of the course she stuck by her own Depressed Feminist faith.

Liberal prejudice

I could become a depressed Professor, too, reading and listening to similar re-

...they would attack a purported failure of the institutional Church...

marks from this class of students, week after week. The most disheartening was the blonde and gentle young soul I will call the “Zaftig Liberal.” The best student in class, in terms of exam scores and articulate written papers, she was “liberal” in both a religious and political sense. She claimed to attend church (was she the Unitarian?), but rejected “this right-wing ultraconservative viewpoint of religion” I was presenting in class. She didn’t believe in religious or moral “rules” but rather in “an inner sense of morality.” She thought Dr. Laura and my other authors were trying to “force” their ideas on others (how could they do that? I wondered), and she bridled at any hint of my authors being “judgmental” when they took moral positions against anything, even though she felt free to judge them harshly and without irony by her own liberal standards.

Furthermore, the Zaftig Liberal conflated “Big Business” with the “political right,” with religious conservatives, who were all in league to put prayers in the schools, stop abortion, take away personal freedoms, give tax breaks to the wealthy, leave children of unwed mothers to starve in the street, and keep tobacco companies unregulated and child safety locks off hand guns. She had bought the whole ball of wax of modern liberalism — and the fact that we were in the Fall 2000 election season probably aggravated her imagination.

In her final paper, the Zaftig Liberal complained about the issues of *New Oxford Review*, *First Things* and *World* as being racist, sexist, homophobic and offensive, and blasted my course for not giving the liberal religious viewpoint. At least she was unafraid to speak her opinions. I answered in the margins: “Well, I chose the perspective I wanted to explore in my course — traditional, orthodox Jewish and Christian religion. I’m sorry you’re so intolerant of that perspective, and wanted instead to read

something that conformed more to your prejudices, but one can’t cover everything or every point of view in a course, and I explained this at the beginning, and told you exactly which viewpoints I would cover.”

If she were going to be unfair to me, you might imagine how unfair she could be to, say, the Catholic Church. For example, the Zaftig Liberal wanted to convict the Church of bigotry, and she held (against my objections) that the Church looked down on interracial marriage. Her proof was that her Irish-Catholic grandfather married her Polish-Catholic grandmother despite his family’s objections to “even this type of interracial marriage”! In other words, the entire Catholic Church and its teachings are held to represent and be responsible for the most narrow-minded inclinations of any of its members. An argument with this kind of mindset one cannot win. She was my best student (and because her scores deserved it, would earn an A+) — yet her mind was closed, despite her conviction that it is religious conservatives who are “fanatical.”

Sidetracked discussions

Such irrational criticisms of the Church were common in my classes, both in discussions and papers. Rarely would students disagree outright with some teaching of Christianity; instead, they would attack a purported failure of the institutional Church or of Christians to do the right thing. This failure gave them, they felt, all the excuse they needed to reject religion.

For example, another lapsed Catholic wrote in response to an article on how the story of Galileo has been twisted for secular purposes: “Okay, the story may be more myth than fact but that does not mean all stories are like that. Christians have done a lot of other very bad things most religious groups have, so excusing yourself

from this little one makes no difference. I would personally like someone to write an explanation of why a mainly Christian nation, the U.S., never bombed the tracks leading to the concentration camps in WW II. Something like that is what the church should answer for, not Galileo.”

And there was the Nordic blonde, who declared in class that she held the Catholic Church responsible for the genocide of the Jews, because Hitler was a Catholic. I explained that, no, whatever his origins, he despised Christianity and fostered instead a type of pagan ideology with racist-nationalist dogmas that were quite the opposite of anything the Catholic Church stands for. She was taken aback by my explanation, uttering “oh!” in recognition of how she had been misinformed. (It later emerged in a paper that her parents were 60’s-type rebels — were they the font of her error?)

I could multiply examples. Constantly I was contending with these students, expostulating with them in class discussions, skirmishing with red pen along the margins of their papers, trying to reason with them, trying to justify the Church and the Christian faith the best I could — knowing that all the while I had to be personally friendly and understanding and respectful of the students, no matter how much I was appalled at their ideas and thought processes. Otherwise I would lose them.

I found myself often talking to them in my mind, making this point or that. Especially on Wednesday evenings, after our class and after reading and commenting on their short papers, my mind was possessed by imagined arguments with my students, ideas which would have to wait another week.

(Read in the December CEJ issue how the author finally had to confront his own agnosticism.)

Book Reviews

Gregory Wolfe, editor, *The New Religious Humanists: A Reader*. New York: The Free Press (Division of Simon and Schuster). 1997, 297 pages plus notes.
Reviewed by Steve J. Van Der Weele, Calvin College (Retired)

Here is an anthology which can expose us as teachers to essays we are not likely to come by in the normal course of our necessary professional reading — often technical, problem-solving, pedagogically-oriented work so essential to our immediate work in the classroom. Sometimes we need to read essays less pragmatically useful — essays that will blind-side us to ideas that will alter not only our methods but our attitudes; not only how we will teach number sets, the Heisenberg Principle, or a Shakespeare play, but where these subjects fit into larger domains of knowledge and wisdom. Everyone has experienced how some idea which seemingly came from nowhere can enrich our pedagogy in ways that had not previously occurred to us. This collection of 19 essays is that kind of book.

Some of the essayists, to be sure, are familiar names: Annie Dillard, Kathleen Norris, Robert Coles, Virginia Stem Owens, Os Guinness, and Wendell Berry are no strangers to us. Nor are they necessarily among the first rank of thinkers — the Galileos, the Miltons, the John Henry Newmans, the Einsteins — all of whom, of course, reward us through their reading. But they

are intelligent people who are shaping the minds of many in our society — Christians and non-Christians alike. And their inclusion in this anthology serves the purpose of alerting us to new answers blowing in the wind.

As the editor puts it, “...nearly every sector of our common life has become a minefield strewn with explosive political conflicts, from our schools and churches to popular culture and the media through which the culture is transmitted.” (xiii) But these essayists represent a departure from this struggle for power to establish ideologies — a motivation all too common in today’s public discourse. These authors sidestep the old coalitions; they prefer to be intelligent rather than militant. Wolfe sees these authors as representing the novelists, poets, and essayists who are at the center of the resurgence of religious humanism in our time.

Wolfe borrows Max Stackhouse’s description of the term Christian humanism: “Humanity cannot be understood without reference to God; and neither God nor God’s revelation can be understood except through the lens of thought and experience.” (xv) He establishes six categories of essays, whose (shortened) titles read: Faith and Doubt in a Postmodern Age; Returning to the Sources; The Assimilation of Modernity; The Church in the World; Nature and Grace: Transforming the Culture; Flesh and Spirit: A Sacramental Vision.

The unifying principle of the collection is to highlight the mischief brought about by the Enlightenment and Post-Modernism, and to reach past these movements to establish connections with earlier views of the world, views grounded in faith and religious

commitment.

Robert W. Jenson’s “How the World Lost its Story” exhibits as well as any of the essays the unifying principle of the anthology. Older narrative literature assumed that we live in a “narratable world.” That literature assumed that the world we live in can be explained by story-tellers. Narratives were dramatically coherent; they reflected belief in a world whose structures can be discerned and understood. And they were all shaped by that great repository of narrative — the Bible itself: “...the realistic narratives of Western modernity have every one been composed in, typically, quite conscious, imitation of biblical narrative.” (139) Contemporary literature lacks this dramatic coherence.

Glenn Tinder’s classic essay “Can we be Good Without God?” is concerned with how the spiritual world — especially the Christian definition of that world — relates to the political world. Man has been endowed, on the one hand, with a godlike dignity and splendor; he is also, alas, an abysmally fallen creature. The dynamic which envelops both these conditions is love — the self-denying, sacrificial love exhibited supremely in the mission and passion of Christ. For a community to flourish in any ultimate sense, these dynamic realities must exercise a continual interplay with each other. In their absence, the enterprise is doomed. To be sure, decent but godless people can and do exhibit humane qualities; civilization would perish without the residual evidences of God’s image in man. But the quest for the pleasurable life which motivates most people must yield to a higher allegiance — as it did, for example, for Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “If we turn away from transcendence, from God,” Tinder asks, “what will deliver us from a politically fatal fear and faintheartedness?” (176)

Other essays beg for attention. Leon R. Kass’s “What’s Wrong with Babel?” also carries out the theme of post-Enlightenment departure from a Christian anthropology. He skillfully traces modern attempts to achieve the autonomy inherent in the building of towers — attempts “to make for us a name,” to build a city of man rather than the city of God. Like the original, these ventures will not escape the divine judgment. Wendell Berry, in his “Christianity and the Survival of Creation,” chides Christianity for ignoring the sanctity of Creation and for its complicity in the environmental crises of our time by uncritically accepting the principles of modern economic systems.

Frederica Mathewes-Green, in her “Abortion and the Search for Common Ground,” believes that the discussion of this painful problem could be improved when the contenders in the abortion debate come to see that one side votes for the mother, the other side for the baby. The debate is raised to a higher level when people see that they need to protect both, not one at the



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expense of the other.

Not surprisingly, one of the essays — Wilfred M. McClay’s “Religious Faith and the Postmodern University” — deals with the contemporary pathology of academia. He, too, traces a pattern of decline — a decline from the initial impulse underlying the founding of universities which were founded in a pervasive Christian cultural ethos. We have gone from (largely) established Protestantism to what George Marsden calls “established unbelief.” In the name of free inquiry, diversity, multiculturalism, and postmodernism, we have denied the Trinitarian basis of knowledge and wisdom and have aggressively secularized the educational establishment. Simple justice requires a greater openness

on the part of universities to the Christian world view. But something else needs to happen. Far too many Christian academics have gone along with the conspiracy. They live beneath their privilege of enhancing and ennobling their high calling. They need to take bold initiatives to bring about the conditions which will permit them to explore the full dimensions of their discipline. And then they should do so.

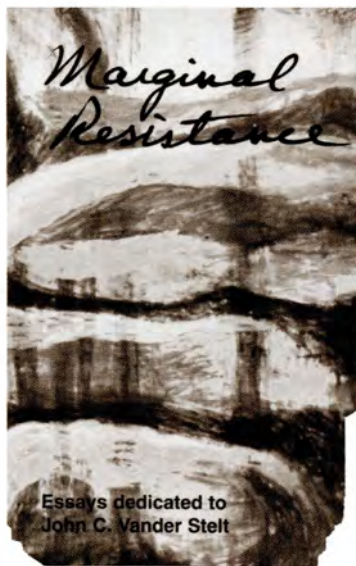
Such a book as this may have to be relegated to one’s summer reading list. But it deserves a higher place than many contenders vying for a place on that list. It is a rich feast, one to alter the mind in constructive ways.

John H. Kok, editor, *Marginal Resistance: Essays dedicated to John Vander Stelt*. Sioux Center: Iowa, 2001. 352 pages plus notes about authors and list of subscribers.
Reviewed by Steve J. Van Der Weele, Calvin College, Emeritus.

This collection of 18 essays, dedicated to a distinguished teacher on his retirement from Dordt College, constitutes a monument, a tribute not only to a person but to a movement. All the essayists affirm their commitment to the Philosophy of Law espoused by Drs. Dooyeweerd, Vollenhoven, and Runner as these men set out to adapt the work of Abraham Kuyper to what they perceived as the needs of a new era. The book includes Vander Stelt’s acknowledgement of his indebtedness to these men as well as his menu of six dangers and seven challenges which he foresaw as facing Dordt College in the years ahead.

At least seven of the essays deal directly with educational concerns — reason enough for a review in these pages. Two of them are biographical, the remainder, though dealing with a variety of issues, reflect a common vision. I begin with a brief examination of the essays which discuss educational issues. (The editor’s organization differs from the one I will be using).

Donald Sinnema takes issue with the well-known goal of “integration of faith and learning.” He quarrels with the dualism implied in this formula, for it appears that faith is made extrinsic to the learning enterprise rather than intrinsic. In its content, methods and application, a given discipline should enshrine faith



more immediately to achieve “normative creational thinking” (195).

Harry Fernhout’s essay addresses a more practical concern — an attempt to find an appropriate undergirding for the vocational program on which Dordt College has embarked. He approves the program but prefers Hebraic wisdom literature as a rationale rather than the college’s phrase “serviceable insight.” Charles Adams tries to do something similar for the engineering profession. Dooyeweerd is useful here in his call for meaning, authenticity and passion; Kierkegaard’s critique of modernity is a good corrective for the pragmatism of our time.

John Van Dyke mildly rebukes Vander Stelt for citing as one of the dangers Dordt must be aware of “the lure of functionalism with its tendency to reduce *what* we teach and learn to *how* we teach and learn...” (xii). Van Dyke contends that this is a false dilemma, that content is modified by process, that a danger just as great is a teacher’s failure to reflect on the art of pedagogy. And Harro Van Brummelen dispenses in his amiable way some Christian principles from his fund of pedagogical wisdom. A Christian school is a community for learning, not a podium for a teacher to display his pedagogical pyrotechnics. He focuses his attention on his granddaughter Jessica, as he formulates his hope

for the type of learning he would have her encounter. May Jessica, and all our children, encounter the goals he proposes for her.

David Rylaarsdam's essay belongs to the group of essays relating to education, though in a somewhat different way. He describes the proper attitude for a teacher as Calvin came to define it after his youthful pretentious ways. We are to be "teachable teachers"; the quality of humility is essential for teaching readiness.

The last of the educational essays is also the last in the collection: Carol L. Veldman Rudie's "Kingdom Coins: God's Resources for God's Justice." This essay serves several purposes. She sets forth in some detail the painstaking process by which she was able to secure a measure of educational justice in her state, Minnesota. She reminds us also that people who engage in such work need to have a concern for the whole community, not just one's special interest. And, finally, she makes it clear, both implicitly and explicitly, that theories and principles can become effective only when they are brought into the public square for negotiation, compromise, and the small gains which lead incrementally to greater ones. "In the end, political victory goes to those who are still in the room at the close of the committee meeting, faithfully holding their political representatives accountable to the need of justice for all" (347).

In addition to Sinnema's essay, the essays of Stuart Fowler and Bennie J. Vander Walt are among the more theoretical ones, and include some of the terms identified with the movement: synthesis, dualism (Van der Walt lists 48 dualisms, adding "etc. etc."),

antithesis, pietism, accommodation, conceptual framework, normativity, and such. Sydney Hielema intimates that philosophic rhetoric must eventually yield to Wisdom "as the hermeneutical key for situating scholarship inside the triangle of Jesus Christ, Scripture and Creation..." (163). Brad Breems challenges modern approaches to the discipline of sociology and indicates how "critical-curative reformational sociology" can better accomplish its mission in the world.

Five essays remain. Roy Clouser traces the history by which the Bible, regarded in early years as having a religious focus, came to be thought of as encyclopedic when science emerged as a rival authority. Wiser heads have always maintained that science is on its own, that distortions occur when we look to the Bible for other than its religious intent. A caveat reminds us that in some ultimate sense, of course, the Bible has implications for all of knowledge. Frank Sawyer's essay on three Russian novelists reminds us all that philosophy is enhanced when fleshed out in works of imaginative literature. Cal Seerveld's essay on William Hogarth, defending that artist's challenge to conventional high art, represents one of the gems of the collection. Henry Aa introduces us to Arie Van Deursen, who staked out "a sovereign sphere" for recreational, though serious, travel. John Hiemstra informs us about Arend Lijphart, who tries to account for the great success the Dutch have achieved in accommodating and integrating cultural minorities. But Lijphart doesn't get it quite right. He views society in mechanistic terms rather than, as Dooyeweerd explains, consisting of rational people who are actors on the world stage rather than as entities who react to circumstances.

Little room remains for appraisal. I am pleased that the tone of the discourse has moderated greatly from the days when the movement was first launched. I regard as significant the several essays which distance themselves from the heavy ontological burdens and display more concretely the implications of the underlying theories. I have reservations about those essays which concern themselves with the antithesis in such a way that it becomes almost a principle rooted in creation rather than an unfortunate catastrophe which God in his grace has set out to contain. And can we really avoid those 48 dualisms and still maintain that, as Richard Mouw explains in his Stob lectures, "He shines in all that's fair"?

For all that, the collection will serve in future years as the legacy of a movement which made all of us more intentional in formulating our worldviews and philosophic assumptions and, thus, enhanced the quality of our work in advancing the reality of God's Kingdom here and now and yet to come.

Personnel Ad

SUPERINTENDENT

Southwest Chicago Christian Schools, with three campuses serving 1260 students in the southwest suburbs of Chicago, is seeking a superintendent for the 2003-2004 school year. We are interested in an articulate communicator with a thorough knowledge and demonstrated ability in curriculum development & implementation, and a willingness to participate in recruitment & development. Confidential inquiries to: John VanGroningen, Superintendent Search Committee Chair; phone: (708)308-6672; e-mail: johnvg@worldnet.att.net. Please send resumes to: 12001 S. Oak Park Avenue, Palos Heights, IL 60463.