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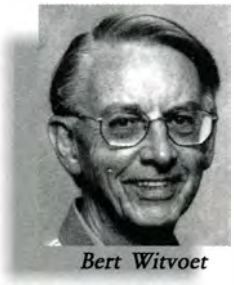
Approaching Mount Silicon

Editorial


Bert Witvoet

Navigating Society's Electronic Wilderness

Every Christian ought to know that whatever has been and will be invented was made possible by the good will of God who made all created things and upholds them even in their fallen state. The invention of the computer is no exception. If it is true of Adam and Eve that they were made "posse peccare et non peccare" (able to sin and not to sin), then something similar can be said of the computer, namely, that it can be used both for the glory of God and for the vilification of God.

It would be hypocritical of me to speak badly of computers. My life and work have been changed by the computer. And for the most part, I like what has happened to my work. As I write this editorial, I use a word program on my computer. It allows me to delete, save, copy, paste, format and print. My e-mail program makes it possible for me to contact contributors, receive articles, send these articles to our copy editor, our lay-out person, our proofreader, all within a very short period of time. The Internet provides me with research material. Yes, my life as an editor has been revolutionized by the computer and the Internet, and mostly for the good. Allow me to say, "As for me and my computer, we will serve the Lord."

I don't use the computer and the Internet much for entertainment, but I do know that the almost infinite possibilities to fill time with trivial or evil activities using this medium are worrisome for our culture and for our families. Chat rooms, computer games and various websites that range from the pornographic to the useless can enslave people and render them unfit for service in God's kingdom.

Troubling forces

It is one thing for us as individuals to automate drudgery with our computers. It is quite another to assess their proper role in the classroom as an education tool. We need to be cautious here. We have to ask ourselves some hard questions about whether or not the entertainment value of modern technology improves learning, character formation and social interaction. A column in our local newspaper laments in its headline that "Kids don't want meals — they want dessert." I'm sure teachers have days when they feel like saying the same about their lesson. Does learning always have to be fun?

Another disturbing question about the Internet has to do with the extent to which children get exposed to a presentation of a world without God. "Our World Belongs to God" says the title of the Christian Reformed Church's Contemporary Testimony. In its Preamble we are told that we live in a world "which some seek to control but which others view with despair." Both the content and the technology of computers and Internet show evidence of control and despair. Of course, the same can be said about the whole entertainment industry — television, films, popular music, VCRs and DVDs. "Our World Belongs to God" is a statement that does not reverberate in our culture.

And then we have not yet talked about the corporate struggle to monopolize the use of computers and various programs. Microsoft continues to look for ways of building computers and programs that are not transferable or separable.

Meatless messages

But the most profound critique of the electronic media I heard one evening when David Lyon, a professor of sociology at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, spoke at Brock University, here in St. Catharines, as part of a Christianity and Culture lecture series. According to Lyon, the Internet reverses the process of incarnation. Christ is the Word become flesh. The Internet is the flesh become word.

We send "meatless messages" to each other. The body is left behind as the message travels at thespeed of electrons. Bodies disappear as we do our business with bank machines and computers. Lyon presented us with the following paradox: Bodies are discarded by the Internet, which makes the most money depicting bodies on pornographic sites.

As Christians we need to ask, "How is a body known?" "How should a body live?" says Lyon. According to him, the crucial question today is not "Is there a spiritual dimension to us?" The crucial question has to do with the body. In Hebrew Scriptures, there is no separation between body and spirit. According to Old Testament stories, we are breathing bodies engaged in relationships. We must rediscover ourselves as human bodies, says Lyon. There is nothing in the Christian drama that is not about incarnation. And so the burning question for Christians and everybody else is, How do we deal with electronic ex-carnations?

Building trust

Let me put some "flesh" to this rather abstract theory of ex-carnation. Almost a year ago, a young woman from Paris, France, found my wife's name on the Internet. Since this young woman carries the same surname as we do, she asked if we were related. My wife handed the message over to me as I am more "Witvoet"

than she is. I replied that, yes, we were related. In fact, I could tell her that her great-grandfather had left Holland in the 1920s for France and that he was a cousin of my grandfather. And so a correspondence developed between her and myself which lasts until this day.

Peter C. Boogaart (l.), CEJ's business manager for 16 years is retiring from that volunteer position and handing over the reins to James Rauwerda. Peter has saved the organization a lot of money by hand-delivering copies of CEJ issues to CSI schools in the greater Grand Rapids area. It looks like James is being trained to do the same. Here the two are seen in the office of Grand Rapids Christian High School. Thank you, Peter, for your many years of faithful service to Christian education in general and CEJ in particular. May the Lord bless the remainder of your retirement with joy and peace! (Photo by Julie Stob)

But it was a strange thing to be e-mailing a descendant of a distant forebear and never to have met face to face. There were times that she became suspicious. Was I to be trusted? Friends of hers warned her that I might have malicious intentions. There was little I could do to dispel those notions (I did not even try) because my flesh had become words. It wasn't until she came to visit us for a week last summer that all these suspicions were removed. We could actually see each other, hear each other and touch each other. We were breathing bodies communicating and building trust. I thank God for the Internet and the way it brought us in contact with each other. But I also came to realize the limitations of this medium.

The actual visit produced what my letters had not accomplished. My distant cousin had lost her faith, she once told me. We had talked about God and the Christian faith many times in our letters. She was curious but very cynical. She even doubted whether God existed. After her visit and upon her return to Paris, she wrote us that she now believed that God existed because she had seen him in my wife and myself. That statement made me realize that incarnation must and does continue today. God becomes flesh through us. But there is no way the Internet can do justice to that momentous and joyful task.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, we are told by Scripture. We as educators and students need a lot of fear of the Lord because we need a lot of wisdom in our use of computer technology. According to David Lyon, "Wisdom is knowing when to say yes, when to negotiate, and when to say no." May we have much wisdom as we shepherd students through this wilderness of electronic media.

Bert Witvoet

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Idols of Silicon

Notes on the New Necessity

by Peter Schuurman

Peter Schuurman is a Christian Reformed campus minister at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ont.

"In education we rely too much on computers," said the computer science professsor. "Students don't think anymore."

This professor was responding to a talk given by Dr. Andrew Basden, an information systems researcher from the University of Salfort, UK.

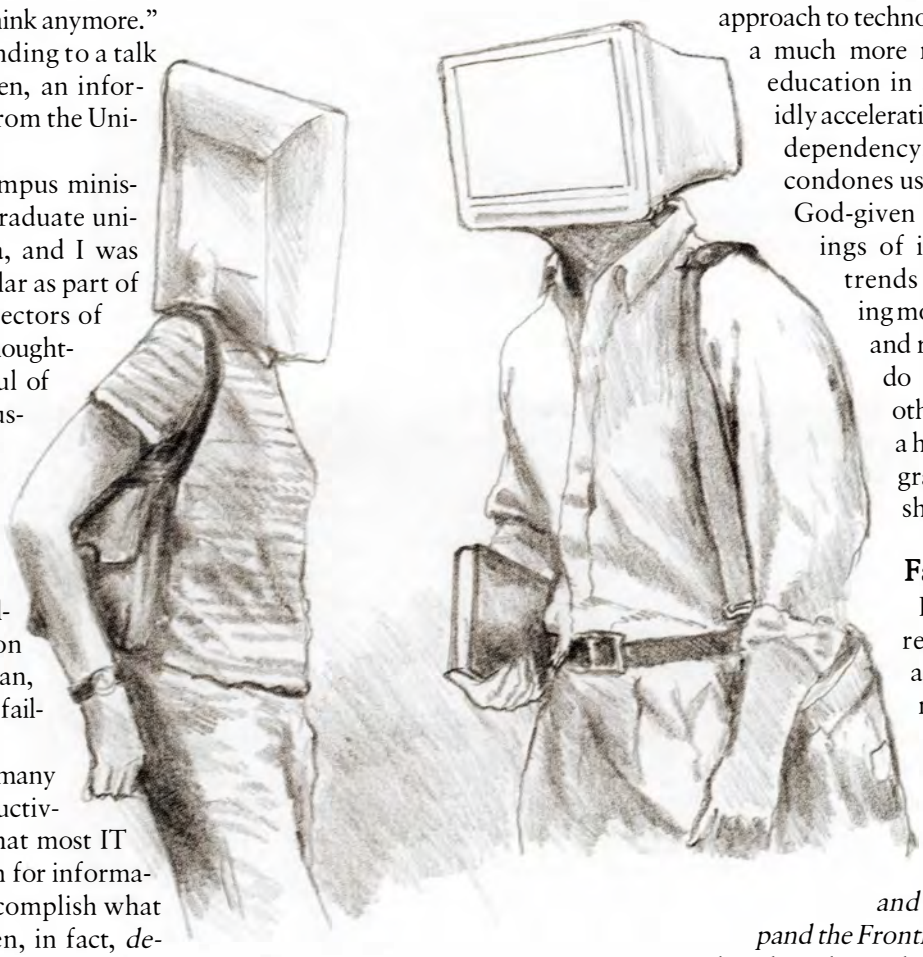
I work as a Reformed campus minister at a small public undergraduate university in Ontario, Canada, and I was hosting this Reformed scholar as part of my mandate to engage all sectors of the university with faithful thoughtfulness. The theological soul of his talk began with a discussion of idolatry — the idolatry of information technology.

Opposite effect

"In the year 2000, $1.5 trillion was spent on information technology systems," he began, "and 90 per cent of them are failures."

Dr. Basden explains what many have come to call the "productivity paradox." The idea is that most IT systems ("IT" is a short form for information technology) do not accomplish what they set out to do and often, in fact, *decrease* over-all productivity. For while they stream-line one particular task, they often require much more preparation and repair in other areas. Take, for example, the promise of a "paper-less" office.

This is the mark of an idol according to the Bible. It is something that takes an iron hold on the imagination. You aspire to it, assuming you "must have it," even though it does little for you. It sets the standards for your projects without alternative considerations, fueled by the fear of being "left behind." This way of life cannot be questioned, even if $1.5 trillion is sacrificed to it with desperate hopes of an increased harvest.



Warnings impede

When it comes to Reforming approaches to education, creation theology is the foundation. And it should be, as Dr. Basden went on to demonstrate in his examples of redemptive IT use. Yet I believe that all the volumes of Dutch Christian philosophy from the last century can be summed up by one small postscript in an epistle: 1 John 5:21, which says, "Dear children, keep yourselves from idols." This is the reverse of the call to unleash the gifts of each aspect of creation: don't exalt one aspect above, and at the expense of, other gifts.

We are more reluctant to make idolatry the operative theological orientation of our approach to technology since it requires a much more radical approach to education in a world that is rapidly accelerating towards high-tech dependency. Creation theology condones using technology with God-given license while warnings of idolatry put all the trends in question, requiring more creative reflection and response. Yet the two do not oppose each other: you cannot have a holistic education program if one aspect overshadows the others.

Faith in technology

I am reminded of a revealing book I ran across while doing my master's thesis, with the zealous title *Seizing the Future: How the Coming Revolution in Science, Technology and the Industry Will Expand the Frontiers of Human Potential and Reshape the Planet* (by Michael Zey, Simon and Schuster, 1994). Not only is the title absurdly long, but its blatancy betrays a simplistic faith in technology and progress. The future is the focus of the book, and the author believes it lies in the hands of technological innovation.

Now, no conscientious Christian school teacher would ever articulate such a false religion, but I wonder if our impulse to

"Students don't think anymore."

expand and innovate may not contain similar beliefs.

"Technology is just a neutral tool that can be used for good or ill," so many will quip. This is a dangerous fallacy. Technology is not just a tool, but an idea. Every design and every technique has a worldview attached to it. Computers are a cultural force, a force that has infiltrated and renovated almost every aspect of middle-class Western America, including many classrooms.

Kids spend *hours* on computers, glued to the screen. They socialize now via e-mail. The world is a different place, regardless of "how" you use computers. Like every other technology, they are a Faustian bargain, an exchange of one reality in favour of an alternate one, an exchange which in turn benefits some people more than others. Technology is an extension of ourselves into the world, and it changes us.

Cold medium

Let us examine some finer critical remarks. The main value that information technologies carry with them is the desire for efficiency. They provide the greatest quantity of information in the least amount of time. IT exalts speed, accessibility, and competitive financial scenarios in favor of all other human values. IT may not exclude values like community, integrity, and wisdom, but they are not the foundation of the technology. The medium is the message, and the medium is fast, superficial, and cold.

The motivations for designing a high-tech classroom often betray this worldview. The rationale often includes the imperative of training students for the marketplace, fretting about how we can shape them so they fit into the broader culture in the most facile way. Issues of security, prosperity, and practicality take precedence over virtues of God's kingdom, like self-sacrifice and participation in God's transforming activity.

Sacramental excluded

Some have questioned whether computers insist on a dualism of our person, a "de-incarnation" if you will. (See David Lyon *Jesus In Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times*) Use of IT is always primarily virtual; it involves a quality of human interaction that ignores the body, touch, and presence. If education is to be transformative, computer dependence is on questionable ground. Jeff Zaleski suggests in his book *The Soul of Cyberspace*: "... not a single person mentioned experiencing a transforming moment while on-line ... sacramental energy has an intimate and necessary connection with the body ... you're here [on earth] to learn about love in the presence of fear, and only by having a body does fear become real" (6, 34, 36, Zaleski). While we may not share Zaleski's worldview, his comments reflect an incarnational approach with regards to God's interaction with his world.

Limited value

This is not to say computers are evil, but it certainly puts a critical slant on the presumption of inevitable progress with increased wiring. Technological growth and human wholeness, not to mention the flourishing of the entire creation, do not necessarily coincide. In fact, they may even be at odds. "Nothing is further from the spirit of the new technology," said McLuhan, "than 'a place for everything and everything in its place.'"

What I am challenging is the assumption that more, and newer, computers make better students of God's Kingdom. Put differently, I'm challenging the assumption that more Christian school tuition money should be spent in the computer department than in the drama department. It used to be said that necessity was the mother of all invention. That time has passed. Now invention has become the mother of all necessity. If it's new, we need to buy it. We have become a world possessed, says Bob Goudzwaard in his book *Idols of Our Time* (IVP, 1981).

Too much image

Electronic media promises more than it delivers. It is image-focused, a feature which does not challenge reading skills. It promises global access to information but provides superficial, at times inaccurate and poorly discriminated material. Its timeless nature may promote a 24/7 lifestyle. Its spaceless reality may lead people to live more virtually than in the real-life communities to which they belong. We are face-to-face with a screen more often than with live, breathing human beings.

Education can be a very simple thing. It's a community of learners who are sharing what they experience of God's world — perhaps first with regards to the place where they live, but also with respect to the whole globe. But the latter should never be at the expense of the former, as knowing ourselves is the best way to open us to the universe.

Impressive medium

God loves computers. They are part of the cubic centimeters over which Christ sings: "I died to redeem you." So I am writing this essay on a computer. I am sending it to the editor via e-mail (although he lives just down the street.) It's convenient, it's fast, and it's even impressive in its power. Somehow, it may provide distance education for isolated people. But it does not make a more insightful essay, sharper ideas, or make me a better person — the kinds of things which are much more important to a good Christian education. We

need to keep on asking again and again, "Is this technology appropriate, redemptive, life-affirming? What are its limits?"

Slow loving

If books like *Future Shock* (Alvin Toffler, Bantam, 1970) and *Saturated Self* (Kenneth Gergen) are any indication, speed and efficiency are making the world anxious and sad. We must nurture children who love and care for the creation and each other, and love is slow.

Kosuke Koyama was a Japanese missionary to Thailand, where he said he learned a slower pace of life from his homeland, Japan. In his book *Three Mile an Hour God*, he writes: "God walks 'slowly,' because he is love.... Love has its speed. It is an inner speed. It is a spiritual speed. It is a different kind of speed from the technological speed to which we are accustomed.... It goes on in the depth of our life, whether we notice or not, whether we are currently hit by storm or not, at three miles an hour. It is the speed we walk and therefore the speed the love of God walks."

God is slow (2 Peter 3:8,9), although not in the sense that we would think of it. He is patient. Education is slow, too. A good education cannot be sped up with increased wiring. It should prepare us for a life-long relationship with God and his world. The incarnation of God in Christ is our model. God places us in his world as fully embodied creatures, to be part of a place, to be part of a community, and to be globally aware.

Acknowledging limits

We are called to engage culture, to unfold the potential beauties of creation and manifest all its hidden glory. This includes electronic media and high-tech equipment, but not without question or reservation. No aspect of culture should become so pervasive, so essential, and so powerful that Christian educators no longer set limits. They must at times say, "No" — "No" to opportunities for greater speed and power for the sake of other values, other disciplines.

As the creation groans under the strains of an already over-developed world, outdoor education initiatives should out-weigh increased commitment to technological sophistication. Maybe camping teaches more significant skills than computing.

I wonder how students feel about computers, camping, and life in God's world. This critical discussion and application of technology in the classroom may be the most important contribution to a student's education in our busy, wired world. Because we educate for life.

Let Power Point Enliven Your Tedious Subject

by Dolores Logterman, John Rinks and Lynda Terhorst

This article is a joint project submitted by the following teachers from Valley Christian High School, Cerritos, California: Dolores Logterman, Spanish; John Rinks, Economics; Lynda Terhorst, English.

Overheard in the faculty room: "We don't *need* a computer to teach. We can do a fine job with a podium, a chalkboard and an overhead projector." But, one might counter, does this really meet the needs of today's students? Maybe. But is that the best we can do? Three teachers using computers in their classrooms maintain that this technology has brought new excitement and higher levels of achievement in a variety of disciplines.

The concept of computers in the classroom raises a variety of images. Some think of a computer on each student's desk with little interpersonal interaction. Some think of a computer tucked in a corner for students to work on when they finish their "real" assignments. Now visualize a classroom where a computer integrated with a data projector and a large 6' x 6' screen is used as a key teaching tool.

Learning Spanish

Imagine you are a student entering your Spanish 3 class. The first thing you see on the projection screen is a live news broadcast coming to you in streaming video from a station in Andalucia, Spain. Wow! Real people, speaking real Spanish, in real time. You find you can understand some of what they are saying because your Spanish teacher asked you to check out the NBC network news this morning so you would have a point of reference. Then you get to discuss with your classmates the latest topics in the news and you ask how the Spanish point of view compares with ours. The teacher gives the remote keyboard to you and you type in the list of comparisons your class comes up with as you discuss them. That list shows up on the screen for all to see, come to agreement on, and record in their notes.

And that is just the beginning of your day in a language class where the computer is the primary instructional tool. You move on to the next activity, learning new vocabulary. What fun that turns out to be. The teacher has created a PowerPoint presentation of a crazy story about two turtles in love, complete with goofy click-art drawings, silly sound effects and romantic music. It is so much easier to remember new words when there is something special like that to help you attach meaning to them.

Next, the teacher wants to talk about the two past tenses that were used in the story. Grammar is never "fun," but it is not so hard to pay attention when it is presented in Power Point slides on a bright, colorful background and the bits of information fly into view, one at a time, in bold, easy-to-read script on the projection screen.

Then, as an end-of-the-period check, the teacher puts up a vocabulary game she created on line. You and your classmates pass around the remote mouse as you play. It is a fun way to see what you have learned for the day. The bell rings and you cannot believe class is over already. As you leave, there is a note on the screen reminding you of your homework assignment and of the practice activities you can work with on the teacher's web page. Now, that was a class that met you where you are at in the world of computers and technology.

Learning economics

As students enter room 29 for their daily dose of Economics, they are often greeted by the latest contemporary Christian mu-

sic video projected on the big screen complete with surround sound audio. Call it a positive commercial for Christian music. The tardy bell rings. "What does the Bible say about wealth?" the teacher asks. As students call out Bible verses, these are quickly brought up on the high speed Internet connection from the desktop computer and projected on the video projection screen for all the students to clearly see. "What does our text say?" and instantaneously the big screen in the front of the class switches from the computer's Internet source to a digital document camera projecting a page from our text.

Following the discussion, the teacher brings up a PowerPoint viewgraph presentation on the computer with important notes for students to jot down. The projected note pages include relevant pictures and graphics, designed to add greater visual stimulus and interest. An Excel spreadsheet from the computer is projected on the large screen to demonstrate changing economic formulas in real time. For the next five minutes students break up into five or six small groups to brainstorm possible answers to the key question at hand, writing their team's best ideas on whiteboards mounted on three of the four walls and preparing to explain them to the rest of the class.

But the best moment comes when a student suggests a certain Bible passage that may be relevant to the question, and the teacher "just happens" to have anticipated that and is ready with a video tape of the Life of Christ that is cued up to that very spot in the movie. So let's all watch that on the big screen in Dolby Digital surround sound audio. When the passing bell rings and students exit this technology-enabled classroom, it is my contention that they learned more and will retain more because of the rich depth and breadth of the information transfer process.

Bottom line: students heard the lesson, saw the lesson, participated in it, and learned it much more effectively than this 42 year old teacher was able to accomplish in a classroom of the eighties.

Learning English

I've had a new "technology classroom" for four weeks, and I would never go back. I'm still learning my way, but the advantages seem apparent already. I teach English. In the first four weeks of school I've been able to present grammar lessons in a Power Point format. The colors and sound effects kept my students focused, even in this most tedious subject. I have handed the cordless keyboard to students around the room; they write sentences which appear on the large screen for others to analyze. Everyone raises his hand for a turn!

In my Advanced Placement literature class I've been able to download Chaucer's "Prologue to the Canterbury Tales" in Middle English and display it. Students could not only read it but also hear it; this led to an interesting discussion about English spelling, pronunciation, and the historical events which caused these changes. The students in my freshman class developed their own PowerPoint programs to present projects based on their summer reading assignments.

Using a document camera, we've scanned mythological maps and illustrations, creating interesting visuals for our unit on

mythology. Because the video equipment is also connected to the computer and the screen, video clips have been easy to incorporate into lessons. Some of these techniques can be used in a regular classroom, but the ease and speed of our "connected classroom" makes them much more effective since little time is lost making the transition from one activity to the other. This year I've had a number of students say, "This is my favorite class." I am excited and so are my students.

The opportunities seem endless. Obviously a lot can be done already with just a computer, a data projector, and a large screen. But we are discovering that there are even more possibilities when we incorporate additional technology, such as satellite TV and TIVO, DVDs, CDs, video players, and digital document cameras — all connected to the projection and sound system. Does it sound scary? Does it sound like a lot of work? It is, but students are more engaged, teachers are more energized, and learning and teaching are more fun. What more could you want?

COMPUTER USE THROUGH THE EYES OF FAITH

By Chris Steenhof

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

In the school where I teach, the single greatest change over the last decade has taken place in the area of computer use. A small classroom with a few computers has exploded into a "lab" with forty computers and all the latest gadgets and gizmos; a technology committee has been created to oversee the use of computers in the school; and countless hours are spent repairing, reconfiguring and replacing this equipment.

In other Christian schools I have visited, this same phenomena is also occurring. School boards, administrators and teachers join in the race for technological supremacy — an infinite pursuit for the perfect computer system. But I have also noticed among these same teachers and administrators a sense of angst arising from this frenzied pursuit. Many educators are uneasy with what is often an unquestioning and uncritical approach to computer use in Christian schools. Some have even begun to ask crucial questions about the impact of computer use and related technology in the classroom.

Consuming medium

Of course, these questions are exceedingly difficult in a culture that has arguably embraced computers more than any other technology, including television. Recent studies have confirmed what teachers have suspected for some time: in homes with computers and Internet access, computers are catching up — or even surpassing — televisions as the medium of choice for today's youth.

Students are spending more and more time playing computer games, e-mailing friends, chatting with strangers, and surfing the web than they were five years ago. And the practice of the classroom mirrors this reality. Students are using the computer in today's classrooms for increasingly longer periods of time and for a wider variety of tasks.

This should not be surprising for anyone aware of the larger educational milieu. In Canada, many provincial governments are setting goals for increased computer use in both elementary and secondary classrooms. Often computers are hailed as saviors for an epidemic of apathetic students, falling test scores and only marginal achievement.

It is in this context that Christian schools must make important decisions regarding computer use in the classroom. And for Christian educators, additional questions must be considered: How does the use of any technology allow for the fulfilment of the unique calling to instruct children "in the ways of the Lord"?

Is it really surprising that Christian schools often seem like rudderless ships, drifting aimlessly in a sea of propaganda and hype, guided more by the whims of a society in love with technology than by pedagogy informed by Christian principles? With increased pressure from the larger culture, it is essential for those interested in maintaining the unique character of Christian education to question seriously the present and future role of computer use in the Christian school.

Determining culture

It is obvious that in North America computer technology influences our society in a myriad of ways. Computers and related accessories are becoming more visible in our homes, our schools and our workplaces; they dominate our interactions and our relationships in ways that alter the values and character of our culture.

In *Technopoly*, Neil Postman, a conservative author and scholar, turns his attention to the role of technology in the North American context. This cautionary tale traces the history of our culture and its relationship with technology. Postman believes that while we may have started as a "tool-using culture," a culture in which tools were used as a means to an end and did not form or shape culture, we have progressed to a state of "technopoly," *where tools have become the culture.*

For Postman, our society has allowed technology to determine our values and ideas because of our unquestioning devotion to such tools as computers. A return to a healthier relationship necessitates questioning and evaluating how tools influence who we are and how we think.

He also believes that it is essential to reject the idea that tools are morally neutral. As with his scathing indictment of television in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Postman asks us to consider the ways in which these very technologies shape and alter our society. He also believes that schools can be places where computers — what he terms the key symbol of "technopoly" — can begin to take their

rightful place as servants and not masters of the culture.

For Christian educators, Postman's words should serve as a warning bell, an alarm sounding above the clamor of voices unquestioningly accepting the computer's intrusive place in our lives. Are computers helping or hindering our desire to allow God to transform our lives and to bring that transformation to the culture around us?

Too much info?

So how do Christian schools best evaluate the role of computers in classrooms and labs? An important first step is a recognition that Christian educators must "even the score" by evaluating and critiquing an educational climate that gives computers Messianic characteristics.

This is not to suggest that teachers turn into neo-Luddite cranks, tossing computers from the roofs of schools. Instead, we must add new fresh voices to the conversation about the use of all technologies in the classroom. These new voices must be willing to address the key issue of how the character of the computer culture alters — often negatively — the way in which students learn.

One of the most important considerations is an acknowledgement that computers stress the accumulation of information, often at the expense of analysis, contemplation and understanding. The very nature of the Internet encourages students to surf from page to page, clicking on hyperlinks anytime mental energy and concentration is required.

As Postman points out, the problems in education do not stem from a lack of information — in fact, students have access to too much information. Instead, students in Christian schools must be given the skills to truly understand, evaluate and critique this information so they can grow in biblical wisdom. In opening the floodgates of information, we must continue to stress the importance of ideas over the mass accumulation of data.

Anti-communal effect

Furthermore, while Christian schools seek to build communities of learners, computer use often isolates and separates students. Jane Healy, an author and educator, addresses this issue in her most recent work: *Failure to Connect: How Computers Affect Our Children's Minds — for Better and Worse*. Healy states that while children watching television often are involved in peripheral play and conversation, children playing on the computer are focused solely on the screen, often playing games that are more "edutainment than educational." Outside of the classroom, chat rooms and technology such as "MSN" give the illusion of relationships but deny the vitality of authentic interaction, robbing students at a time of life where genuine friendship is imperative.

In addition, technology isolates students from the material they are studying. The Internet allows students to gracefully insert quotations from Shakespeare's great tragedies but does nothing to encourage the reading of the actual work itself. The Internet can de-contextualize and fragment subject matter into byte size pieces, not allowing students to achieve a sense of continuity and wholeness.

Visual dictator

Finally, the unquestioned use of computers and Internet use in the classroom encourages students to forget that authentic education requires commitment, dedication, and self-sacrifice. The tyranny of the visual that is an integral part of the popularity of the Internet and educational games detracts from the power of the spoken and the written word. The Internet is the guiltiest contributor to this problem, often substituting enticing pictures and fragmented text at the expense of depth and analysis. With the integral connection between truth and the spoken and written word for the Christian faith, we must continue to be wary of the limitations of the visual.

Of course, computers and the Internet do offer many positive things to the classroom experience, but in educational circles the voices that extol their benefits have for too long drowned out the whispers of those warning of the deterioration of the learning environment. In future conversations that center on this important subject, all perspectives must be considered to begin the search for a solid biblical and educational approach to computer use in the classroom.

The road ahead

What lies ahead for Christian schools that wish to see the issue of computer use in the classroom through the "eyes of faith?" What are some concrete steps that schools can implement to provide a biblical and balanced approach to this integral subject?

The first step must be to include all voices in the discussions on technology happening in staff rooms, at teacher's conferences, and in school board and education committee meetings. To questions that center on "how" or "what," we need to add the more important questions of "why" and "at what cost." Technology committees should include both those excited about and committed to computer use and those who question the role of computers in the classroom. Finally, these same committees must grapple with the divergent ideas of writers such as Postman and Healy that cut across the grain of dominant educational philosophy.

Trying to balance our approach to the use of computers may lead to radical

changes. Healy suggests that children under the age of seven should not be using computers because it reduces their amount of time involved in relational and tactile experiences, the manner in which children learn best. While removing computers from lower elementary classrooms may raise a few eyebrows, it may be a sound educational step.

Christian schools must also ensure that the study of the history of technology and the evaluation of its role in our lives is included in curriculum throughout the grades. From an elementary teacher who asks students to consider the positive and negative aspects of specific technologies to secondary classrooms that tackle more difficult concepts,Christian schools must be places where students are guided to consider how technology affects us as learners, as Christians, and as human beings. While this aspect of the curriculum could be left to technology courses, a critique of technology would be more effective if it infiltrated the curriculum at a variety of places.

What is more important, educators must keep the goals and objectives of their courses and their schools at the center of any discussion of computer use in the classroom without being distracted by the glamor of the latest technology or educational tool. Christian education flows out of Godly relationships and human interaction. Teachers who strive to teach their students to be servants of God are infinitely more valuable than even the most revolutionary software or hardware.

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Slouching Toward Bedlam

Of Mice and Mimes

by Jan Kaarsvlam

Jan Kaarsvlam will be trading the blue skies and cool breezes of Byron Center for the palm trees and alligators of Lake Worth Christian School. Jan, who was preparing to teach music, ran into trouble when the other member of his department expressed dissatisfaction with Jan's proposed six-week unit on Tuvanese throat-singers from a Calvinist perspective. In Lake Worth, Jan plans to grow a handlebar mustache and assist with disciplinary matters on the high school level.

Carrie Wellema burst into the Bedlam teacher's lounge with anger in her eyes, fury in her heart, and a crumpled wad of computer paper in her fist saying, "Where is that little weasel, Creed Albrecht?"

"Computer troubles?" Cal Vandermeer said as his eyes drifted from the morning's crossword puzzle to the crumpled paper in Wellema's hand.

"My printer keeps printing upside-down question marks at the bottom of the page, I can't even get into my account, and now my screen is blank. Wally is over in the other buildings today and tomorrow, and so I'm supposed to rely on his little helper student guru guy who I can't find!" Wellema's face was turning red.

The door to the lounge opened with a bang, and there stood Rex Kane — poet, philosopher, and Phys. Ed. teacher. He wore black pants, white socks with black penny loafers, a black turtleneck, little round sunglasses, and a black beret, tipped at a jaunty angle. With a vivacious grin he shouted, "*Zeut alours*, musketeers!"

Carrie Wellema sank into a chair and put her head into her hands. No one else could tell whether she was sobbing or laughing maniacally in preparation for a total mental breakdown. Counselor Maxwell Prentiss-Hall, known for his charitable spirit, came to the defense of both Creed Albrecht and Wally Friedman. "I don't think you are being fair, Carrie. I mean, Creed is only a student, and poor Wally — slashed budgets, three school networks to maintain, technology that is obsolete within three months of being installed. The poor guy. You couldn't pay me enough to take his job."

"Apparently they don't pay him enough to do his job either," said Carrie, "because he sure isn't doing it. Nor is Creed. I can never find that kid when I need him."

Cal Vandermeer sat up, ignoring both Carrie and Max. An idea had occurred to him. He addressed the rest of the room: "Listen, we all know Wally Friedman doesn't really maintain the school's network, and, like many of you, I've turned to Creed Albrecht as nearly my only 'creed' in information processing anymore." A general moan rose from the faculty at Cal's attempted witticism. "And we all know that the administration doesn't seem to care that Wally has kids doing his work. But maybe we could get their attention with a classic social protest tool. What if we had a technology sit-in? We could refuse to use any computer technology in this school until the administration makes Friedman get his act together."

Jon Kleinhut looked up from his coffee (which he brought in a thermos from home because he didn't like to drink coffee of uncertain origin) and responded to Vandermeer's idea. "Good thinking, Cal. Don't you realize that is just what they want us to do? Do you forget how hard we had to work to get the board to buy us computers in the first place?"

Christina Lopez, who had walked in as Kleinhut had started to talk, tossed a quizzical look toward Rex. Hunched over and pulling hand-over-hand on an imaginary rope, he appeared to her as a cross between Marcel Marceau and Dr. Zaius from *Planet of the Apes.* Ignoring Rex, a talent that had taken her two years to learn, she turned to Kleinhut. "But, Jon, I'm not sure I really need my computer to teach anyway. I am trying to teach my kids to imagine, to see what is in the stories that they read. Computers undercut all that."

"Chopped logic," cried Kleinhut, "chopped logic." His Adam's apple bounced like an excited pinball up and down his throat. "We need computers. They are the future. How are kids supposed to be able to cope with technology in the workplace, the home, and even at church, if we don't teach them?"

Christina frowned. "You want to talk chopped logic, Jon, think about it for a minute. You really think we are teaching the kids when we have to rely on a student to help us whenever the printers go down?"

"The fact that we are behind in our own professional development is no reason to take it out on the computer program." Kleinhut was angry now. He had just come off a five-year stint on the technology committee.

"Haungh, haungh," Rex laughed with a horrendous French accent. "You are a *cauchon*, zat iss, you are a leetle, leetle peeg."

A look of shock passed across Kleinhut's face. Rex grinned, "*Parley vous francais*?"

Kleinhut shook his head as if trying to clear it of fog. Rex continued, "You know, Jon, I have eet on ze best of authority zat ze CIA ees collecting fingerprints on all citizens through ze computaire keyboards."

Kleinhut suddenly looked fidgety. His eyes bounced from Rex to Carrie, from Carrie to Christina, and, then, abruptly, he spun on his heel and left, muttering something about finding Creed Albrecht to see if he could get his keyboard wiped down.

As he left, Carrie Wellema lifted her head from her hands. "Be

serious for a minute. I just don't understand why we should have to resort to things like protests or figuring out how to teach without computers. Why can't we just have computers that work?"

Rex smiled. "Ah, zee foibles of zee computaires. I offare a challannge. I say I can insult zee computaire in twenty deeffrent ways."

Christina, who had just finished a unit on *Cyrano de Bergerac*, recognized Rex's gambit and rolled her eyes. As Rex began his grand recitation, Cal Vandermeer spoke up. "I remember a meeting some 10 or 15 years ago when we spoke of a technology plan. Everybody was going to have a computer, with the whole school wired, and maybe someday a computer for every kid. Now, most rooms have a computer, but half of them don't work. What good is that?"

Rex crossed behind Cal and patted him on the shoulder, giving him a pitying glance. "Ees zat ze best you can do, my *cheri amour*? You waste your opportunity. Let me geef you a few eegsampels:

"Descriptive: Eet's a papairweight, an offees chair, a desk credenza! No wait; it's a broken computaire.

"Pedantic: Ze only lesson ze computaire can teach ees zee gravity as you drop eet out ze window.

"Rustic: That there ain't no compyuder; that there's a Commodore 64." Rex's momentary slip into a Kentucky drawl threw his audience, but before anyone had time even to question it, he slipped back into his mock French accent.

"Practical: Zees computaire would make a goot boat anchor.

"Naïve: Eet vill be feexed by ze end of ze week.

"Admiring: Zeez computaires may not work, but zey will eempress ze parents at ze Open House.

"Gracious: *Merci*, three computaires zat do not work are so much bettair zan one zat does not work.

"And, finally, parodying ze Edmond Rostand, who *sans* computaire wrote *Cyrano de Bergerac*, "Zees computaire destroyed ze harmony of ze good teachaire's mental health; see how ze traitor blushes for shame!"

A moment of stunned silence gave way to wild commendation. Christina Lopez was the first to break into applause. She stood, clapping slowly. Carrie, not understanding how it was possible, but recognizing that Rex had put his finger on the pulse of all her frustrations, joined Christina in her applause. One by one every teacher in the lounge joined. Finally, Cal Vandermeer, a huge grin on his face, rose to his feet and whooped. Just then Wally Friedman entered, glanced around the room, and then nervously began to clap his hands. He stood slightly behind shop teacher Gord Winkle.

"Hey, Winkle," he asked, "Why are we applauding?"

Without turning to see who had questioned him, Winkle said, "Oh, man, you missed it. Rex was great! He just totally roasted the tech guy Friedman."

Winkle turned to see whom he was addressing, and a look of shock and horror crossed his face. To avoid having to say anything, he shoved the entire blueberry muffin he was holding into his mouth. He nodded in embarrassment and crossed to the other side of the room.

"All right, Rex," Cal said, slapping him on the back. "So you're with us on the computer sit-in?"

"*Mon Dieu*!" exclaimed Rex, unaware of the blasphemous nature of his exclamation, "Je *taime* my computaire! Whan my students are all playing zee basquetball, I can do zee crossword, ordaire a pizza for lonsch, and study my Fraunch-by-e-mail lessones. I cannot live wizout my computaire."

The brief misplaced enthusiasm for Rex deflated like a fallen soufflé. A single muffin bit, playfully tossed by Gordon Winkle, hit Rex on the shoulder. Moments later, a hail of muffin bits pelted him, thrown by every disgruntled, computer-mad faculty member within grabbing range of Winkle's muffins. Wally Friedman, still not quite understanding, looked down at the bagel he was eating, considered adding to the barrage, but thought better of it.

As he backed toward the wall under the onslaught of baked goods, Rex managed to gasp, "When I go beck to ze gym and doff my beret, I will take wiss me one thing, one thing zat despite your baked goods you cannot take away. And zat ees" — Rex sank to the floor — "Zat ees…my panache."

The Left Hand of God (2)

by Jack Stauder

Dr. Jack Stauder is professor of sociology and cultural anthropology at a state university in the northeastern United States.

In this second installment, the author describes how, after a frustrating time contending with students who always argued against orthodox Christianity, he found himself changed by watching a movie that mirrored his experience in class.

On such a late Wednesday evening, early in December, as our course was nearing its end, I wanted relief from my thinking about it. I wanted escape. To achieve this, my habit has been to watch films I tape off the American Movie Classics channel. These are mostly black-and-white films of the 1930s, 40s, 50s — so different a world from ours now, truly "the past as a foreign country"! — but a "country" I remember from growing up during that period (I was born in 1939).

In September I had taped a slew of these movies, and over the semester I had been now and then watching them, in no particular order, working my way down the stack of videotapes. This December Wednesday, only one movie was left: its tape box had a yellow note stuck on it, saying only "The Left Hand of God (1955)." An interesting title, I thought. But I had totally forgotten what the movie was about or why in September I had chosen to tape it, a decision based only on the brief description in the newspaper TV listings.

Wet entry

Anyway, I slipped it into the VCR and fell back to watch. The titles told me why I had taped it: Humphrey Bogart, my favorite, was its star, together with Gene Tierney. The film, directed by Edward Dmytryk, is based on a novel by William E. Barrett and set in "A Remote Province in China — 1947." It opens with Bogart on a mule, on a rainy night in mountainous terrain, dressed as a priest! A bridge breaks under them, they fall into a raging stream, and Bogart, after struggling ashore, walks up the hill towards a compound with a cross over it.

It is a Catholic mission compound, staffed by three resident Americans — Dr. Sigmund, his wife Beryl, and Ann (Gene Tierney), a nurse. They offer tea to their new priest, Father O'Shea (Bogart), who has arrived to take over the mission. They are interrupted by the news that an old man is dying in the infirmary and needs last rites. The doctor muses how he will "enjoy a postmortem" on the old fellow, and tells the Father: "Don't take him seriously, he's a case of survival of the fittest — over 80." Father O'Shea is at first reluctant. He has lost his vestments and holy oil in falling into the river, but Ann pleads with him to oerform the last rites for the man. He has been waiting for the Father, believing his immortal soul to be in danger.

Father O'Shea goes to the patient's bedside, hears the man's confession in Chinese just before he dies. Then O'Shea and Ann pray, "Our Father Who Art in Heaven..." and a "Hail Mary."

Work awaits

In the following scene, the next morning, O'Shea is awakened in bed by a smiling Chinese valet and "altar boy," John, who begins telling him all the Masses the Priest needs to say in various villages, how 42 couples are waiting to be married, 36 children need baptizing, and so on — it has been a long time since the previous priest died. O'Shea looks warily at the cross above his bed, and comments drily, "I guess the work really is piled up here."

Some lively scenes follow when the doctor, aggressively proud of being a materialist and a scientist, argues with Catholic Bogart/O'Shea about religion. The doctor thinks the mission should be close. It has become a waste of time and money. The death of two priests keeps the people from coming, and the Civil War and rampaging warlords in China have made the place too risky for the Americans. Father O'Shea disagrees: the mission should be kept open. The spiritual purpose must be paramount. The doctor gets angry with him.

On the other hand, Father O'Shea gets on very well with nurse Ann. He admires her obvious commitment and her loving way with Chinese children. She takes him on a walk around the village, and as he helps her over a rivulet, he remarks, "It's been a long time since I've been out walking with a pretty girl." Ann is somewhat embarrassed: she didn't think priests said things like that! He counters with something about the life he led in college.

Strange behavior

Other incongruities begin to emerge about Father O'Shea (as if a priest being played by Humphrey Bogart were not incongruous enough to begin with). O'Shea keeps asking everyone about when the trade caravan to the coast will pass through; apparently this is the only way to escape this bandit-infested region. Under his pillow, in his room, the priest keeps a pistol handy. And directly in front of the people, he uses a couple of deft martial art chops to fell a bandit type who has shown up at the village gate.

But he does his priestly duties well, urged on by John: "Christ died for all." "Good point," O'Shea concedes. Though he can't offer Mass because he has lost his holy objects, nevertheless Father O'Shea is soon giving sermons in church, breaking away from the canned text he has cribbed from the bookshelves, to say something in Chi-

nese which greatly pleases the parishioners. Obviously knowledgeable about Chinese culture, the priest performs a series of acts that impress the local people and win their allegiance — even that of the children, for whom he plays the piano and sings a Chinese version of "My Old Kentucky Home."

Eventually Father O'Shea has to minister to a woman dying of childbirth, whose child was born dead. At her request, he narrates the story of Mary and Joseph and the birth of Jesus in the stable. After she dies, he goes to look for her husband, who in his sorrow is drunk in the local brothel. O'Shea knocks the drink out of the man's hand, slaps him a few times, and then tries to comfort him with the assurance that his wife and child are now in heaven with God. The man looks up through his drunken haze: "Do you believe that, Father?" Bogart looks into space, hesitates slightly, and replies, "Yes, I believe it."

Threatening danger

Meanwhile, predictably, the nurse, Ann, is showing signs of falling in love with the priest, to her consternation and to the amusement of the doctor's wife, who teases her about the priest having "a lot of appeal" and "magnetism." Father O'Shea, for his part, begins to confide in Ann. He rues his action in hitting the bandit at the gate, and fears that violence is ahead at the hands of the local warlord. Maybe the mission should be closed. Ann argues that they can't — the people need the mission. O'Shea says the Americans need to be back in the United States: "I belong back in the States, married, raising a family."

Overlooking the unpriestly bent of this sentiment, Ann replies that she had been married, to an American pilot who was shot down and killed over China in the war. This had led her to the mission, to do work for the people her husband died fighting for. "They need medicine and grace." She wants to stay despite the danger. Father O'Shea is visibly touched by her noble commitment.

The real story

Beryl, the doctor's wife comes to visit the priest, to tell him she is sure Ann has a crush on him. She says she thinks the Father needs help, and advises him to seek counsel from another man of God, Mr. Marvin, at the Protestant mission over the hills. Father O'Shea takes her advice, and when he arrives at Mr. Marvin's, he immediately rips off his collar and reveals he is not "Father O'Shea" at all. He is a former pilot named James Carmody. The film goes into flashback.

Carmody tells how, after he had been shot down in the recent war, he had been picked up by the local warlord, Yang (Lee J. Cobb). Yang kept him prisoner but used Carmody's military talents. One day on patrol Yang's men kill a priest, the real Father O'Shea, on his way to the mission. For Carmody, this is the last straw. He wants out; he is tired, and wants to quit. The pilot mentions that he was once an altar boy, and says of the dead priest, "He came here to do good." To escape Yang, he decides to pose as the priest, dressing in his clothes, so he can cross through the territory without a passport from Yang. If he can get to the mission, he can wait for the caravan to the coast.

But now, Carmody tells Mr. Marvin, he cannot go on living a lie. He just wants to leave. The Protestant tells him he must inform the mission that he is not a real priest: "scandal hurts everyone."

Forced by events

They are interrupted, however, by news that Yang's forces are advancing, beating people up and causing terror. Yang is searching for Carmody, and the pilot reluctantly concluding that he must return to the mission, replaces his clerical collar. At the mission, the doctor is ready to resist with guns, but Carmody, still posing as the priest, dissuades him, telling the doctor and Ann to trust him.

At this point, Carmody enters the church alone, and approaches the figure of Christ behind the altar.

Here I am, Lord. I'm not going to pray. What I have to say, I'd like to say standing on my feet. These people think I'm a priest. I have nothing to offer but faith in a God I didn't believe in or didn't think existed. It doesn't matter now whether I was right or wrong in what I did. It's too late. You dive into a pit and then you have to crawl out hard. Then there's nothing left to do but try to square the account. That's just about how it stands. I wanted *You* to know.

A risky offer

The next day, Carmody gives his gun to the Doctor and goes to confront the warlord. Yang threatens to burn the Catholic villages unless Carmody returns to his service. Carmody refuses, and dares the warlord to shoot him, a deed which would, of course, defeat Yang's purpose. Knowing the warlord's weakness, however, Carmody offers to gamble: if he wins, he gets his freedom and the village is not touched. If

he loses, he will serve the warlord for five more years.

Yang rolls the dice: three sixes. "Ha! Father, Son and Holy Ghost!"

Carmody rolls four threes. "You lose. You shouldn't have invoked the Trinity."

But then Yang threatens the Protestant villages with destruction. Carmody must bet again, three years of service this time. He throws a pair of threes — a low score. But the warlord throws only a pair of twos.

Yang admits he wouldn't like to shoot Carmody. Instead, to save face and gain the future support of the villagers, he'll proclaim that a miracle has happened. That night, we see John telling the villagers how the Holy Ghost had touched the warlord through the priest.

Confession time

Meanwhile, with Ann, Carmody is confessing that he is not a priest. He never has been. He has written the bishop, who has sent two priests to take over the mission. Carmody must leave by the caravan that brings them. Ann replied: "I won't believe it. You couldn't have done what you did today and not be Father O'Shea. These people kiss the hem of your cassock. They follow you as they would a saint."

Carmody confesses that he got rid of Yang through gambling. "There wasn't any question of faith. There wasn't any miracle. I just got lucky with the dice cup."

"Then who are you?"

"A flier like your husband. I crashed up there, only I survived. Then I made one big mistake. I tried to get out of Yang's trap, and I walked right into a bigger one — this mission, God's. And I found His trap is tougher to get out of than Yang's. Well, now it's over, tomorrow everybody will know ... I was a fake. Nothing I did had any authority. What the Church decides, I'll do."

Ann: "You're not the only who has something to atone for. I have too. I fell in love with a priest." Carmody: "While a man who wasn't a priest was falling in love with you." She runs out of the room.

A fond farewell

The next day the two priests arrive and interrogate Carmody. They have heard of the alleged "miracle." He confesses he rolled dice and bet five years of his life to save the parish. "What if you had lost?" the priests ask. Carmody smiles, "I had an odd feeling I wasn't going to lose."

They decide he must leave the next day, and keep up the pretense he is a priest until he reaches the bishop. No spiritual harm has been done, no one will know, and it is "better to preserve the faith of the people than to expose you." They ask him not to discuss matters further with the nurse.

After leaving the priests, Carmody goes back into the church alone, sits down in a pew, and looks around him.

The next day, Carmody is saying his goodbyes to the devoted crowd of villagers outside the compound. Inside, watching from a window, is the nurse, Ann, talking with one of the newly arrived priests. She explains that "Father O'Shea" was to her a priest, "as much as to the people of these villages .... A good priest, who came here because we needed him.... He earned the real love of these people. They put their faith in him, just as I did. And he didn't fail them." She looks out on him with emotion — a trembling smile and tears welling up. "Why, I don't even know his name." The priest supplies it: "James Carmody." She smiles, no doubt imagining that she and Carmody have not seen the last of each other.

Carmody leaves the village on his mule with the caravan, the people behind waving and crying , and the children singing "My Old Kentucky Home" as the movie ends.

Parallel course

One could offer a lot of cultural commentary on this interesting film. However, I was affected personally as I watched it that night. I was transfixed by the elements that spoke to my own situation. Of course, no complete parallel existed. I had not saved any villages or earned anyone's devotion. I had not risked my life or made any difficult but noble decision. I had not pretended to be a priest or even to be religious.

However, in teaching my course on religion I had found myself, like Bogart/Carmody, forced into a situation where, though I had felt little faith, I was obliged to defend the Faith. I was compelled to play a role like Carmody's, upholding religious values despite my ambivalence — because I felt bound to do it, that it was the right thing to do. Was I being used by God, like Carmody, as his "Left Hand"?

And what about God's trap, as Carmody calls it? We see him drawn back to his boyhood faith by the situation that forces him to act *as if* he is a priest. He comes to believe in God once more and submits to what he believes to be God's wishes. He can't escape doing what he knows is right. In doing so he becomes, in a "left-handed" but real way, a "priest" for a short time, for the people who desperately needed one at the time.

Similarly, although without any heroic component, I had become a defender of a religious tradition for an audience of students, many of whom wanted to abuse that tradition. Speaking *as if* I were a believer in that tradition, like Carmody I came actually to believe in it, more strongly than ever before. And, like Carmody, I came to see I *did* believe in God after all.

In fact, I watched this 1955 Hollywood movie transfixed by the sense that through it God was showing me my condition in a way I could understand. He was explain-

ing what was happening in my life and asking me to go forward with that understanding. It could not be just a coincidence that this particular videotape had been lying there on that night for me to watch.

So ran my feelings at the end of the film. I was stunned.

Positive response

My religion class had only a couple more meetings before the end of the Semester. I considered showing *The Left Hand of God* to the students, but decided against it. Instead, I briefly told them the plot of the film, and explained in an understated way how I saw some parallels with what I had been trying to do in our course. They listened with tolerant amusement. I'm not sure they understood.

We had our final exam. The only student I had to flunk was the Pale Blue-eyed Materialist who had been the first student in the class to appall me. Of course he was not flunked for that occasion, but instead because he had skipped half the classes and had revealed in papers and exams that he had learned next to nothing. But most students earned fairly good grades. I was in a merciful mood.

After our faculty hand in their grades, they can look at the student evaluations that are taken during the last week or two of classes. Somewhat surprising to me, the evaluations of the course turned out generally very positive. Most of the students, anti-religious or religious or neutral, commented that they had really liked the discussions. I was hardly as popular as Father O'Shea, but still I was comforted by this news.

Religious students, like the Devout Veteran, thanked me for the course, and told me the readings and discussions had bolstered their faith. The unbelievers and enemies of traditional religion, however, remained by all appearances unconvinced by my apologetics. I guess I couldn't convert or inspire, either, like Father O'Shea.

Positive outcomes

However, two heart-warming comments appeared. The Nordic Blonde, whom I had disabused of the notion that Nazism was based on Catholicism, wrote, "Your class ... has certainly opened my eyes to such concepts as "postmodernism," the possibility of a new Christian awakening in our world, the importance of having faith in God, and the necessity of reading material with a judgmental view. I won't forget what I have learned in this class, though I don't agree with some of it. I thank you for introducing me to the ideas."

Another student, a quiet young Catholic woman, who had not taken any strong stand in class or in her papers, added a little note under "Other Comments" at the end of her evaluation: "Job Well Done. I was very ambiguous towards religion and now I, too, feel a bit of a defender of it." She understood my situation exactly!

But the course is over. It ended in December. It is April as I write these words. Recently the university announced that the Militant Atheist of my classroom has just been awarded a prize for his activism in organizing all sorts of environmental projects and registering students to vote. He has found his substitute for religion.

Also during this April, on Good Friday, I called a former faculty member, now retired, whom I knew to be a devout practicing Catholic. I made an appointment to meet with him over coffee the next day. We were happy to see each other again after a long time. I told him I needed his advice. I wanted to belong to the Church. How should I go about joining it?

The next day was Easter. I felt very happy, as if I were in God's Right Hand, at last.

Panel Dot Edu

How Important Is Academic Excellence?

Clarence Joldersma (cjolders@calvin.edu) professor of education at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich., asked the Dot Edu panel to consider the following: Many of CSI high schools and elementary schools are structured on a liberal arts *model of curriculum, or a preparation for such a curriculum. Many CSI schools pride themselves in having high academic standards. Is it really true that high academic achievement is next to godliness and that a liberal arts curriculum is the mark of a true Christian school? (or that perhaps high grades are the marks of a true Christian student).*

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

September 4, 2002


Lois Brink

Clarence, are you casting the grading-academic achievement lure? Are you angling for a big splash? I'll bite on this one by asking whether grades reflect academic achievement. It is my sense that academic grades are a composite these days, that they reflect a mixture of perception and expectation, of mastery and effort, diligence and achievement of the teacher's standards as well as understanding of the discipline. So to say that high grades are the mark of a Christian student may be to say that students who get high marks are working diligently, patiently, honestly, courageously, creatively, and with charity and a sense of stewardship. It may be that demonstrating all those Christian virtues in their school work is the mark of a Christian student. This is not the only mark of a Christian student, but it certainly could be one mark. Ha! Back to you.
Lois

September 6, 2002


Tony Kamphuis

Lois and Clarence, I'm a little ambivalent about the "high academic standards" language thrown around in Christian school circles. Likewise, I'm a little wary of the "academic excellence" type of slogans used to promote our schools. If it is an accurate reflection of how our students perform, well, fine, go ahead and use it as a descriptor. But it easily creeps over into sounding like that is the *raison d'etre* for our schools. If your town had a Christian school that very intentionally tried to shape the students' experiences from a Christian perspective yet scored only average or even below average on standardized tests created by secular humanists, would you send your kids elsewhere? Or would you encourage the school to "shape up"? I hope not! If your school decides that some sorts of community building activities should take some of the time that might otherwise be used to drill math facts, and if that hurts your level of "academic excellence," it still might be the right thing to do. If we go about our business of doing integrally Christian education and that happens to match up nicely with whatever authorities are testing, that's great! Otherwise, I say, we stay the course, listen to see if there is something we can learn from others involved in education, and continue working on what we discern as God's priorities. In terms of Liberal Arts education, I'll need to return to that one later.
Tony

September 8, 2002


Tim Hoeksema

Tony, I wasn't planning to play this round, it being the beginning of the school year and all, but I couldn't resist responding to your idealism. If our schools were not academically excellent, they would be empty. The reality is we need to be academically excellent AND intentionally Christ-centered in all that we do. That is sometimes my frustration as principal — we need to do all the things the public sector does (and do them "better"), and then (or at the same time) we need to fully integrate our curriculum with our faith and develop thoughtful, caring Christian young people equipped to redeem creation and re-shape our culture in the name of Christ. Is it a wonder we have a tendency to run teachers into the ground with all the demands we place on them? By the way, Clarence, why do you bring this up at the beginning of the school year? If you asked your question at one of our faculty


Clarence Joldersma

meetings in September, you would be ruled out of order and asked to form a study committee to meet over the next summer and report back to the faculty in the fall.
Tim

September 9, 2002


Pam Adams

Tony, I agree wholeheartedly with you. Academic excellence should not be our reason for being. Too often Christian schools and colleges advertise by pointing to high academic rankings.

In regards to the liberal arts model Clarence asks about, I would want to have us look at why we consider this model to be Christian. Preparing students for all kinds of work should be what we are about. The liberal arts model tends to be elitist because it values the mind over other aspects of living and learning. It also looks down on vocational training. When we look at many Christian high schools we do see a tendency to shortchange technical and vocational learning.
Pam

September 16, 2002


Johanna Campbell

Tony, I, too, agree with you. I remember when Jack Michielson from the Christian Parents Controlled Schools in Australia came to visit B.C., he advocated burning our high schools down and starting from scratch. He wanted to build new creative ways to 'do' high school. A group of educators plans to look at that very problem this summer (in a course called Education 621: New Dimensions for Christian High Schools, offered at Calvin College). How do we make learning for our teenagers relevant to their daily living, fitted to the gifts of students and practical to the tasks of every day? What would schools look like if we allowed 12- to 18-year-

olds to work on becoming adults? As you say, Pam, preparing our students for all kinds of work is what we should be about. We say our students are uniquely created in God's image; how do we put that belief into practice when it comes to setting up a high school? We do not want toteach to state or provincial exams; we want to equip our students for a life of responsible discipleship in the world God has created. We want them to live with skill within God's created and revealed design.
Johanna

September 21, 2002

Pam, The Liberal Arts model has survived for some time. Is it possible that it does approximate in some way the various dimensions of creation, and that is why it has stood the test of time?
Tony

September 23, 2002

Tony, I agree. To borrow from Calvin College's curriculum work, the liberal arts are "a means" for students and staff to have an engagement with the many "spheres" of God's big world.

Rather than raise again that perennial debate between vocational discipleship versus informed community participation, Calvin's "Engagement with God's World" reminds me that the liberal arts curriculum with its core learning expectations can be a means to both service and understanding for our K-12 students. Clarence, you ask if there is a "Christian curriculum." I wonder if the mark of a Christian school is the integration, the worldview, the shalom we bring to classroom and curriculum we teach. I can think about a different form and content for school, with high learning expectations but not in the usual liberal arts format, one that also teaches for responsible discipleship and informed participation. This may or may not be marked as a true Christian school, and its style of curriculum has nothing to do with it. As I think about this, I wonder if style of responsive instruction is more the mark of a Christian school?
Lois

When All Speak Well of the Christian School

by Ken Dickens

Ken Dickens (kdickens@cpcs.edu.au) works for the National Institute for Christian Education in Blacktown, N.S.W. Australia.

Most Christian Schools, especially those which become moderately "successful," experience tension between market and mission. The problem is that we often measure success by the standards of the world — looking good, acquiring possessions and achieving results. For a school, these things are easier to measure and promote than character formation or transformed thinking.

Success is very seductive, and Christians can understandably think that promotion of our success honors God. The fact that we share in Christ's triumph can lead to a cheap triumphalism, a mode of thought which asserts that Christians are always winners. The assumption appears to be that being Christian will mean having a great public profile, good resources and facilities, and achieving great results in academic, sporting and artistic pursuits. It will mean having all the things which make for good marketing and strong enrollments. In short, it will mean succeeding in all the things the world holds dear.

Now, there is nothing wrong with success, and God will sometimes allow his people and his communities to achieve great acclaim. But success in these terms does not automatically follow faithfulness. Some faithful school communities will continue to struggle and be thought of as weak and insignificant in the eyes of the world. Triumphalism is a false, cruel and unhelpful expectation to put on these schools. For schools which glory in their success, on the other hand, triumphalism may be a harmful distraction to their mission. Indeed, for many, the focus may be on maintaining the image despite a confused vision.

Biblical reflection

The Old Testament certainly teaches an expectation of material blessing following faithfulness. However, the experience of many prophets should also teach us that prolonged faithfulness will also attract suffering, abuse and misunderstanding. The teaching of the Wisdom Literature, particularly Job and Ecclesiastes, warns against a mechanistic approach to faithfulness and blessing. Imagine a school where Job was the Board Chairman. Would you not want to get rid of him quickly? Or can you identify with Asaph in Psalm 73 when, perhaps, you look at a godless school which attracts enrolments while yours languishes?

The New Testament is full of teaching where we are warned about expecting to prosper as the world counts prospering. To the world, Paul was a failure. Compared to other "successful" false apostles, Paul did not rate. In chapters 10 to 13 of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, we can read a deeply personal and painful defense of his ministry — in the face of apparent failure. But Paul knew his own faithfulness and, even more, he trusted in the faithfulness of the One who had commissioned him. Paul said he would rather boast about his weaknesses and his sufferings than about his successes and credentials. What implications does this have for our schools when to even admit weaknesses is promotional suicide?

Jesus said in Luke 6: 26: "Woe to you when all men speak well of you." In other words, we need to be concerned when the world thinks we are doing a good job in our schools. Aren't we supposed to be doing something which is entirely different — and which the world hates?

And yet there will be times when our faithfulness is attractive to the world. In Acts 2: 46-47, the Christian community is described as "enjoying the favor of all the people." That seems to indicate that we may enjoy a good reputation. There may be times when our image is good, when we are well thought of, and successful. But this should not be our aim! It may happen, but it is not guaranteed. I have been in a school where the same faithfulness has brought kudos and disdain at different times. I was surprised at the good reputation, and then I thought the demise of the reputation to be undeserved. Perhaps we should be guided more by the wisdom contained in the Beatitudes. The point of the Beatitudes is not to avoid success but to focus on a new set of priorities — one radically different from the world. It is to seek God's Kingdom — the way the King sought it — through humble obedience and dogged determination, and to carry out the mission regardless of what publicists would advise.

In a world where style appears to triumph over substance every time, is it wrong to have a good reputation? No, but we need to be careful. We need to watch that we are not nurturing the reputation and allowing the vision to die. In Revelation 3, Jesus said to the Church at Sardis: "I know your deeds. You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead." It is true that we are to guard our reputation, but, as Peter reminds us in 1 Peter 2: 2, it is to be ac-

complished through godly living rather than through successful living.

Importance of community

It is interesting to note that the fact that the early church "enjoyed the favor of all the people" seemed to be owing to the quality of their communal life rather than their remarkable achievements. Authentic community, I believe, is the key factor in maintaining the integrity of Christian Schools. Rather than seeing ourselves as providers of a marketable commodity and the parents as consumers who must be kept happy, we ought to be building "covenant communities" (Stronks & Blomberg). Schools as covenant communities are made up of teachers, students and parents committed to each other in loving and honest relationships and engaged in a common task motivated by a communal vision. Rather than promoting ourselves to our "clients," we need to be dialoguing with fellow members of the learning community and together submitting ourselves to God's word to clarify and reform our vision.

The members of this community need to be affirming together the nature of the school's task. Is this task characterized by helping students "unwrap their gifts — share each other's joys and burdens and seek Shalom," as Stronks and Blomberg suggest? Is it to teach children to become light and salt in the world?

What is the school's task in relation to the prevailing culture? Is it to protect our children from their culture and to teach them how to be separate? Is it to help them survive in a culture with which they must identify, or is it to help them critique and work towards the transformation of their culture (Niebuhr)? Or is it to provide a safe and effective environment in which to pursue the success agenda of the world? Is it to accept the status quo but make sure our kids get a big enough slice of the world's prosperity?

There are so many things which make up a school, and parental expectations vary so much. But we need to work out together

What Triumphalism Does to Our Kids

A typical scenario would be as follows:

"A Christian School gains a reputation for discipline and academic standards. Parents with troubled children seek out the school. Their children may have learning difficulties or social problems. The school takes them on out of a sense of mission. Pretty soon these students start to affect the tone of the school and they certainly affect the average results in public exams. The other parents become concerned that the school is disadvantaging their own children. The reputation in the community suffers. Discipline is cranked up, and expectations for students to perform are raised to redress the problem. Tensions increase. Bright students are withdrawn. Average results continue to fall. The reputation is tarnished beyond recovery in the foreseeable future."

Now this is a simplistic scenario. Obviously, the school would need to weigh each case judiciously. The particular student and the numbers of students would need to be commensurate with the schools' capacity to handle their needs. However, most Christian Schools would have experienced this dilemma to some extent. The reality is that many wonderful things are often happening in this situation. The "problem" kids often, for the first time in their lives, feel like they belong. They are cared for, not just by staff, but by their peers, many of whom engage in selfless ministry. These peers are developing life-long skills and attitudes while they continue to perform in their school work. And the "problem" kids begin to improve and experience success. Nothing you would put in the Newsletter or the promotion brochure, but success nonetheless.

And all the while the school is "going down the tube" in public perception! And the kids sense it! They learn that they are not supposed to have problems and that their "success" is more important than service. They learn that those who enhance the school's reputation are more worthy than the rest. They learn that the Kingdom of God is respectable, neat and tidy and achievement oriented, and pretty much like the culture in which they live.

what the main task is. When we do this we can keep evaluating every aspect in the light of that main task.

Most schools undertake this exercise in their early days but as the school grows, "professionalism" takes over. The school becomes an educational business where the product is packaged and marketed to an increasingly demanding clientele with an overwhelming range of aspirations. Christian schools easily become inexpensive private schools in the educational market place. They bear the added burden of the triumphalistic expectation for "success" because they are Christian.

It is imperative that these schools get back to communal vision clarification. This will show that the school cannot be all things to all people and that enrollments may suffer. That's a frightening business. But it is also frightening to think that we may be killing our schools through growth!

The lowly chosen

We need to remember that the Kingdom of God in its mustard seed stage is messy and insignificant. We need to remember that Jesus hung out with misfits and undesirables. We need to remember that God chose to glorify himself through the church, which is full of problem people. It's good for our pride to read 1 Cor. 1: 26 - 29 often: "Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you

were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not — to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him."

God forbid that, in the name of success, we ever create "Christian" selective schools and exclude the weak.

Conclusion

My concern is that the pressure of the market may have caused many Christian Schools to move down that very path. This is nothing new. The educational landscape of Australia is littered with schools which once stood for the values of God's Kingdom but now stand for the values of this world.

It won't be government interference or lack of funding which will kill our schools. It will be our dearly bought *success*! We will become very good at being like the other successful schools. Our appeal will grow but our impact for the Kingdom on our culture will be negligible.

The remedy is to be more concerned with faithfulness than success, to be more concerned with life than growth, to be more concerned with mission than market. It will mean having the courage to grow slowly and maybe stay small.

Above all, it will mean spending less time in selling education to consumers and spending more time in inviting people into community to do something different and dangerous — putting Jesus and his radical teaching into the center of everything we do.

Thinking Thirteen

Stereotyping Hurts

Nancy Knol
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At the high school where I teach, a group of students meets together with two teacher sponsors to discuss issues related to diversity, and to spend time socially with students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. It began with just a handful of kids, but within a few years it blossomed into a group of nearly 100 students. They are a lovely mix of African-American, Asian, Caucasian, and Spanish. Even though our high school has a majority of Caucasian students (especially of the Dutch CRC flavor), we are increasingly becoming more diverse, and we want out students to comfortably accept each other and learn to appreciate how they are alike and how they are different from one another.

One of the assignments for this group of kids is to teach the ninth-grade English classes for one class period the first semester. The theme of all the literature studied that first semester of ninth-grade English centers around various kinds of isolation. Several of the stories point to stereotyping as the cause of isolation. So our diversity group presents a lesson on stereotyping.

But they don't tell the ninth graders that. They simply come into the classroom and ask the students to separate into groups, which are determined by where the student attended middle school. We have five or six "feeder" middle schools represented at our high school, so the ninth-graders return to the people with whom they attended middle school for this assignment. There they are asked to make a list of characteristics of the students from the other middle schools. After they have done so, they report what they believe to be true of these schools as a member of the diversity group charts them on the blackboard for all to see.

What is fascinating — and sad — is that the lists are so negative. One school may report characteristics like: "snobs," "cliquey," "poor sports," while another will be described as: "ghetto dwellers," "cocky," "loud." This is the fifth year that I have observed this lesson being taught, and every time the result is the same — negative and hurtful in tone, with a complimentary characteristic rarely offered.

Having finished this part of the exercise, the diversity students proceed to ask someone from one of the schools if the descriptions of their particular middle school fit. This is where the enlightening part comes, because the students are often outraged, embarrassed, and genuinely surprised at how their middle school is perceived. As they begin to talk about where these stereotypes come from, some really honest, insightful dialogue occurs. The diversity group leads well, and they conclude with some impassioned pleas for more understanding and fairness.

As teachers of middle school students, we must be conscious of this tendency towards negative stereotyping. It seems to me that in middle school particularly, our students have a strong inclination towards seeing issues and people in an "all good or all bad" light, with little forbearance, and even less compassion. This is the time when we must be especially attentive to our calling to be ambassadors, not only to those in the public realm, but also to those who find their way into our midst, hoping for community. Too often they are baffled by the walls put up, whether for self-protection or self-congratulation. Neither is acceptable.

I can remember one time, and only one, when one of the groups said only complimentary things about the various middle schools. One of the diversity students, an African-American young man, who was full of personality and good will, grinned after the positive presentation and proclaimed, "A mirrrrrracle has happened!" Perhaps we can find ways to make those miracles more ordinary.

Query ?

How to git jung stoodents to spel correktly

Tena Siebenga-Valstar is a former teacher and principal. On October 6 of this year, she successfully defended her Ph.D. thesis at the University of Alberta. We at the Christian Educators Journal congratulate our faithful columnist and friend on this marvelous achievement. We encourage all teachers and principals to submit a question for this column, even if they think they know the answer. Please send question(s) to Dr. Tena Siebenga-Valstar, 168 Windsor Dr., Fort McMurray, Alta., T9H 4R2, or e-mail her at tvalstar@telus.net.

Recognize the spelling stages

Question #1

I am teaching in a multi-grade classroom, with fourth-grade students being the youngest in the class. I realize I always have to make adjustments at the beginning of the year because the fourth-grade students seem so young. Some of them seem to have a lot of trouble with spelling. Can you give me any help?

Response:

The stages of spelling competence or knowledge predict the errors that pupils will make (Booth, 1991). In the beginning stage, preschool children identify certain relationships between the marks they make and the sounds of the language. At the second stage, children begin to spell alphabetically, matching sounds and letters systematically, sometimes noting features of sound to which adults no longer attend, for example, beginning "try" with "ch."

As they begin to read and are instructed in word analysis, they start to store sight words. Their own writing gives expression to their understanding of the relationship between speech and spelling. They begin to discover the within-word spelling patterns. Students should be able to read the words selected for a formal spelling program, and the words should be selected because of a common salient feature, e.g., short vowel phonogram, beginning-consonant digraph. Ample time should be given for students to write creatively and purposefully, and attempts to spell unfamiliar words should be rewarded rather than penalized.

At stage 3, students can give the correct representation for the short vowel sound and include a silent letter with a sounded one to represent the long vowel sound. Their silent reading and oral reading become more natural. With this comes an exploration of the variation in spelling patterns and the context of the pattern, a discovery that some patterns are predictable whereas others are not, and some are governed by the letters surrounding them. There is much to learn as they examine the new patterns they meet. As well, children begin to deal with word meanings which involves "past tense," compound words, homophones, prefixes and suffixes.

Many third- and fourth-grade students are at stage 3; therefore, instruction should emphasize study of basic pattern features of words. Suggestions include:

Review basic long-vowel patterns taught at stage 2 and examine other common long vowel sounds.

Introduce common diphthongs (e.g. how, boil).

Study the r- and l- influenced vowels.

Examine compound words and their meanings.

Learn the function of homophones in spelling.

Examine common inflections and the ways in which they are joined to base words (e.g. -ed, -ing, -ly).

Study the concept of base or root words.

Study both the sound and meaning of the common prefixes and suffixes.

I trust this background and these suggestions will help you deal with your students at this stage of spelling development. Study of the two subsequent stages described by Booth may be helpful in teaching students who are beyond Stage 3.

Conduct painless spelling evaluation

Question #2

The second question relates to the first one. Do you have suggestions of how to evaluate spelling so that the students do not become totally discouraged?

Response:

As indicated in the answer to the previous question, learning to spell involves many facets. The common method of the teacher marking the students' writing of a given list of spelling words is only one way of assessing their ability to spell and does not encourage students' sense of ownership in the process. An opportunity to have a conversation with students about spelling may occur in the context of a conference on their writing. From this a teacher can determine the child's self concept regarding his or her spelling ability. Information about their previous spelling instruction may reveal that the student lacks experience in looking for spelling patterns or is unable to use spelling patterns when faced with unfamiliar words. The conference may reveal that the child does not read very much. Children who do not

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engage in reading limit their exposure to print and the words they could use in their own writing. Listening to a child read may reveal difficulties in decoding. If the child pronounces the word incorrectly, he or she will likely spell the word incorrectly. Hearing difficulties resulting from minor infections or major infections which necessitated the insertion of tubes in a child's ears may have led to gaps in a child's understanding of the spelling system.

A teacher can do an assessment of a student's spelling ability while responding to a student's writing. You may find that a student has a number of errors. Develop a chart format where the correct spelling of the word is written beside the student's misspelling. Beside the first two columns make one for each of the following headings: Omission, Insertion, Doubling (of letters), Transposition, Mispronunciation, Homonym/homophone, Phonetic substitution. Indicate by a check mark the type of error which occurs in each word. A list of 10 - 12 words may indicate the areas of difficulty for the child. You can then address the area of need of this particular child or a group of children.

When marking the spelling of beginning spellers, a teacher might check all the letters the child has written correctly, rather than the ones which do not correspond to the correct spelling. I have had third-grade children mark their own pre-tests using a chart similar to the one previously mentioned. Children then become aware of the areas in which they are making errors. The awareness allows them to be more conscientious in their future writing and more likely to ask for help in dealing with the difficulty.

As indicated earlier, students need to be taught spelling patterns and strategies; therefore a pre-test focused on these is required. Give them activities which help reinforce the spelling concept following the pre-test. If students spell the words correctly on their pre-test, there is no need for them to repeat these words for their weekly test. To fill the test quota, students may add their own special interest words including words from sports, subject areas, place names, or words which create special difficulty. This means each student has an individualized spelling list which the teacher must check to insure that the words are spelled correctly.

Under the teacher's direction, children find a partner for their weekly spelling test. Each child gives their partner the test. The students then correct the tests together using the list which the teacher has previously checked. Initially there may be more classroom noise than one would expect during a traditional spelling test. This method, however, does allow the students to take ownership of their own learning and goes beyond short term memory so often used to recall words for a weekly spelling test.

You may be familiar with the 100 most frequently written words. If students can spell these words they can already spell 59 percent of all the words they will likely use in their writing (Thomas & Braun, 1983).

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Education for life:
An Open Letter to Nick Wolterstorff

Nicholas P. Wolterstorff, *Educating for Life: Reflections on Christian Teaching and Learning* (edited by Gloria Goris Stronks and Clarence W. Joldersma). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002, 298 pp., $19.99. Reviewed by Harro Van Brummelen, Dean, School of Education, Trinity Western University.

Dear Nick,

An open letter to you, I feel, is the best way to review this collection of your essays on Christian education. You and I have had discussions over the years about the issues in this book. Usually these took place when you were in our area for a speaking engagement. This letter gives me the opportunity to say in what ways my fellow Christian educators and I myself have benefitted much from your insight and support of Christian schooling. It also allows me to ask where we still need to develop deeper understanding and better implementation of a biblical praxis for Christian schooling.

The articles in this volume span more than three decades of your articles and speeches. The book captures well your extensive and long-lasting contributions to Christian schooling. No other person has, either directly or indirectly, influenced the thinking of Reformed Christian educators as much as you have during the last 35 years. I admire the ways in which you have tried to bridge the gap between theory and practice. You have also recognized and taken into account that such theory and practice inform each other — a likeable quality in a philosopher!

Educate for life

This volume, Nick, brings to the fore several of your personal characteristics. You demonstrate a keen ability to analyze issues and push forward our collective thinking. Throughout, you remain humble. For instance, you openly state how your views have changed over the years, sometimes more because of personal experiences than philosophical analysis. And you are always gracious even to those with whom you disagree.

These characteristics come to the fore, for instance, in the way you trace how Christian perspective in schools must be faith realized in all of life. You oppose those who want to educate solely the intellectual dimension of life. You rightfully take W. Harry Jellema to task for his narrow view of educating the mind. But you are fair in describing his viewpoint. Moreover, you also express your admiration for him as a master teacher and a person of stature.

Moving beyond educating for intellect, you explain how we must teach for shalom, for God's peace and justice. You wonder why persons such as Jellema and Dooyeweerd and their followers did not pay more attention to injustice and human suffering. You appreciatively quote an Anabaptist leader: "You Calvinists are always leaping over the fact of sin" (p. 76). But, at the same time, you are not afraid to criticize your own earlier writings for emphasizing the Cultural Mandate without calling attention to issues of justice.

Lively discussion

Most of your thinking is carefully crafted. Once in a while, though, Nick, you go out on a delightfully precarious limb to make your point. In one essay in this volume you say, "There is good reason for concluding that home economics, rightly understood, is the central course in the curriculum of the Christian school" (p. 155). I not only remember that speech,but I still use this example each year with my second year philosophy of education students (giving you due credit!) when we consider what should be "basic" in the schools. Invariably, it leads to a lively and worthwhile discussion.

Almost as provocative is your claim that "the principal function of a literature course in a Christian school should be to acquaint students with the aesthetic dimension of literature" (p. 40). I'm still not sure whether you truly believe that it's *the* principal function. For you go on to criticize *The Diary of Anne Frank* for being a "profoundly humanistic work" and therefore "religiously insidious." There it becomes clear that, besides honoring the artistic merit of literature, you are equally concerned that schools discuss embedded religious issues. In the meantime, you've made your point. Too often in Christian schools we do overlook the aesthetic dimension of literature and, indeed, of reality.

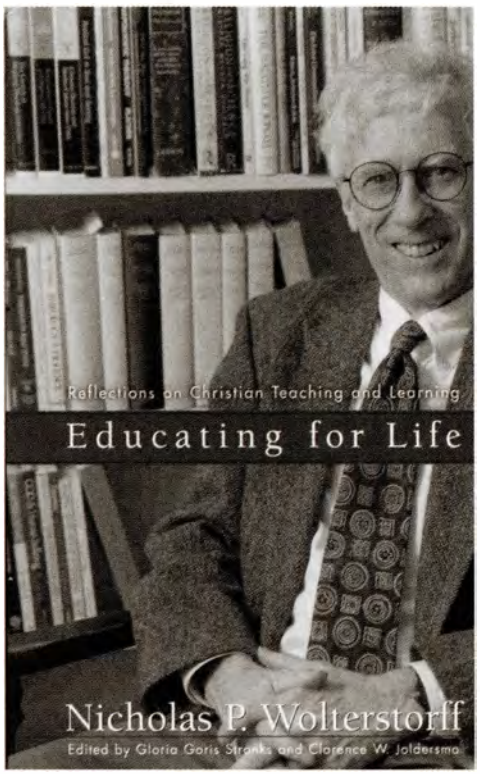
Foundation of thanks

I'm glad that the speech you gave in the mid-1990s about teaching for gratitude is included in the book. Probably I didn't talk to you about it for, if I remember correctly, you were off to the Far East immediately afterwards. You mention in your last essay in this book ("Teaching for Justice") that you "got the distinct impression that the audience did not much like what I had to say" (p. 276). I cannot speak for the audience, but I do remember my own reaction. It was quite positive but, even more so, thoughtful and reflective.

In that speech, you introduced ideas whose implications were far-reaching and gave us much food for thought. "Gratitude lies at the foundation of Christian existence. From this, everything flows. If the Christian school is to educate for Christian life, it must educate for gratitude," you said (p. 272). You added that what we've usually called the Cultural Mandate of Genesis 1:28

is not to be seen as a command but as a blessing.

Now no doubt our schools must "breathe the spirit of gratitude" (p. 272). Also, all of God's mandates are indeed blessings in that they enrich our lives as we fulfill our calling. They allow us to live lives of thankfulness. But is educating for gratitude *the* basic characteristic of Christian schools? It seems to me that it's a spoke that we cannot do without in the wheel of Christian education. However, there are other, equally important spokes: love, forgiveness, justice—and God's mandates or injunctions.



Even the mandate and blessing aspects of Genesis 1:28 and 2:15, it seems to me, cannot be separated. As the wheel turns, we obey God's mandates, experience their blessings, and deepen our gratitude. There's a tangled complex of issues here that is difficult to unravel. What I do appreciate, Nick, is that you've pointed us once again to some spokes and rotations of the wheel that all too often we disregard. But the hesitation of your listeners and readers may well be because we need time to think through the implications of your claims and arguments.

Teaching for reconciliation

What is the heart of your book? I believe it is about the purpose of Christian schooling in a pluralistic society. Your 1992 Toronto speech in this volume well sums up your vision. Christian schools that operate in gratitude and obedience to God cannot focus solely on the Cultural Mandate. They teach for healing, reconciliation, peace and justice. They do so in ways that are healing and reconciling and that exhibit peace and justice (p. 258). They also do so in a context of awe and gratitude — these are deeper attributes than obedience (p. 259). They achieve "the right ordering of our relationships — with God, with society, with nature, with the legacy of human culture, and yes, with oneself" (p. 261). These schools exhibit,celebrate and equip for shalom as well as to lament its absence (p. 262-63). And even though learning can be arduous, they open up "the range of delights available to a human being" (p. 264).

What, specifically, does this mean for the classroom? Are Christian educators up to the task of resisting the narrow, technically-oriented performance standards approach that currently holds North American education in a suffocating grip? Are we ready to infuse our curriculum with your far-reaching, biblically-based vision? I believe that, in part due to your influence, Nick, a substantial number of Christian schools made solid headway in the 1980s and 1990s. But today I also see retrenchment into "teaching to the tests" rather than "educating for life." Christian school educators have work to do. They must (re)define their vision. And then they must work at that vision permeating the life of every aspect of their schools.

Wider appeal

Do I have any regrets about this book? I can think of only one, and that is an editorial one. You yourself say in the book that a Christian school must be "as ecumenical as possible without losing its orientation" (p. 167). I not only agree, but I believe that your work is far too important to be aimed mainly at the Reformed community. Your speeches had to address the specific Christian school audiences that invited you. Most often those were audiences involved in schools where the leadership was Reformed. I had hoped that the editors of your book would have taken some liberties to delete specific references to Reformed Christian schools. Then it would have had more appeal to the broader evangelical community, where today there is much openness to considering the goals and purposes you describe in this book.

In short, your book deserves a broad audience. I hope that many Christian teachers not acquainted with your speeches or writings will read it. And I trust that many who do know you will go back and savor, discuss, and work at concretizing your ideas for their classrooms. This collection is a long-lasting testament to the vision that God has allowed you to share with us. For that, I am deeply grateful.

May God's shalom surround you as you continue to serve and to celebrate.

Harro Van Brummelen

Book Review

Schultze, Quentin J. *Habits of the High-Tech Heart: Living Virtuously in the Information Age*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002. Reviewed by Peter Schuurman, campus minister at Brock University, St. Catharines, Ont.

Before we are even born, electronic technology gages our progress. As we peek into the light of our first earth day this technology encircles us. Gradually we are taught its ways, and it becomes a taken-for-granted part of the fabric of our lives. We become a part of its seamless web, and we are dependent.

Because this process is so subtle and so pervasive it takes an urgent voice to rouse us from our sleep-walking. Quentin Schultze is one of those voices, speaking passionately and convincingly of the mortal danger that lies hidden in a life wrapped in electronic wires. He claims that we are lost in a "techno-moral crisis" that threatens not only the moral muscle of the nation, but also the very condition of our souls. Our minds and hearts are persistently bombarded with hyped-up cyber-myths of progress rather than the life-giving wisdom of our faith tradition and the virtues it upholds.

A reluctant cultural engagement

Schultze's thesis is another example of what William Ogburn called "cultural lag" — the notion that the technological parts of culture are implemented long before any thought of their social or ecological consequences has been considered. We are forever trying to "catch up" to the social and moral dilemmas that new technologies engender. In the case of new information technologies, Schultze says, the situation is grave. "Our cyber-

innovations today are running far ahead of our moral sensibilities," he contends (19). It has exacerbated to the point where we can only imagine technological solutions: "We increasingly assume that doing things quickly and effectively is more important than doing them carefully, thoughtfully, and ethically"(18). In effect, we have bought into the "quasi-

religious philosophy of *informationism*, a faith in the collection and dissemination of information as a route to social progress and personal happiness"(21).

Schultze's book describes how these electronic media facilitate moral decline and cultivate a focus on the "is" of life rather than the "ought." The structure of the media prizes impersonal observation over intimacy and participation, and exchanges measurement for meaning, information for wisdom. The vices of arrogance, impatience, and greed are fed at the expense of the virtues of humility, humor, neighbourliness, friendship and compassion. In sum, the instrumental drives of technique, says Schultze, sideline the rich moral resources of our religious traditions.

Schultze speaks generally of "moral wisdom" and "religious tradition," and uses examples from the Judeo-Christian tradition. When he elaborates on the virtuous life in contradistinction to instrumental electronic life, his illustrations of caring, accountability, truthfulness, empathy and integrity all ring with biblical allusion. His primary sources of inspiration for cultural analysis come from such great writers as Vadclav Havel, Alexis de Tocqueville, Jean Bethke Elshtain, Paul Virilio, and Wendel Berry, which makes his book a rich source of critique and vision.

It is interesting to note a cultural orientation coming from this Calvin College communications studies professor that differs from the upbeat tone Calvinists tend to have when talking about the cultural mandate. Gone is the language of "transforming culture," and in its place is a more reluctant cultural engagement. Schultze speaks of "backing away"(73), "reticence" (93), "resistance" (197), and "saying no" (198). His positiveexamples come from monastic and Amish communities rather than from more integrated Christian cultural traditions. It could be that the gap between the Spirit-filled life and modern secular technologized life has become so wide that talk of "transforming" this monolith through intimate participation in it seems impossible. Transforming may still occur, but it may be more strategically accomplished through our removal and return, rather than through immersion in the electronic superhighway.

Schultze's book is accessible, rich with resources, and prophetic for our time. There is an irony that lends itself to a deep credibility with Schultze: his urgent warnings arise out of his experience and research as one of the founders of the gospel.com web site and an author of numerous books on electronic media and Christian faith. Schultze himself confesses wistfully that "such machines seem to divert my attention from the central concerns of life — such as love, gratitude and responsibility — to relatively trivial pursuits with little enduring value" (13). It is to that life of thankful responsibility, stewardship and service that this book calls its readers, lest they become strangers to the better part of themselves.

Otto Selles, *New Songs* with Relief Prints by Geraldine Selles-Ysselstein. Kitchener, Ontario:
Pandora Press, 2001. 88 pages, including notes and references.
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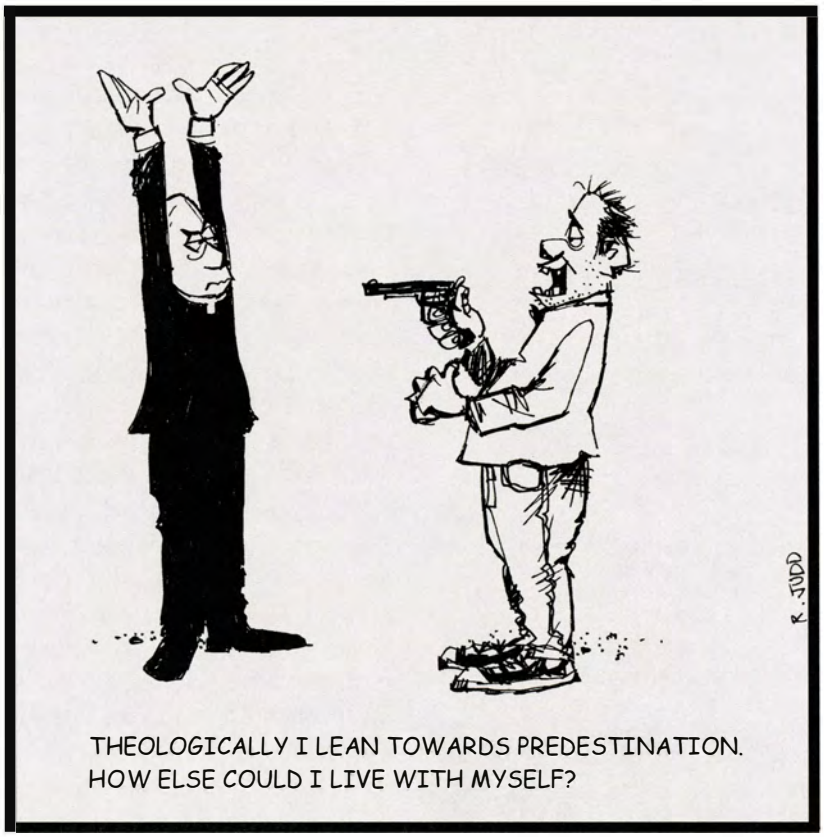
I subscribed recently to the publication of the American Academy of Poets. It was, I thought, a good way of putting a finger to the cultural winds, a way of ascertaining what elicits the passions of thoughtful people nowadays who love language and express their imaginative life in the apt, precise, and rhythmic discourse we call poetry. I shall not be renewing my subscription, and I have told the editors why. The poems are far too narcissistic, too self-centered, too much concerned with the internal workings of the poets' minds. They tend to be, to use Shakespeare's phrase, "cabbined, cribbed, confined." They lack serious subjects, have little substance, and seem to suppose that eroticism is pretty much what this world is all about.

How refreshing, then, to encounter this delightful collection of poems — "new songs" as Otto Selles calls them. He writes them surely, in part, as a response to the biblical injunction (see Psalms 96 and 150) to avoid the deadening repetition of pagan formulas and, instead, to constantly enlarge the musical repertoire of the believing community. He chooses worthy subjects to begin with; practically every poem refers to a specific biblical character or situation: Rahab, the one-talented man of the parable, Judas, Lot's wife — who turns out, very perceptively, to be as well the builder of houses on sand —, the elder brother of the parable, the men who flanked Jesus on resurrection Sunday on their way to Emmaeus, Goliath, and the parable of the soils, to name a few.

Selles relies heavily on the genre of the dramatic monologue, which calls for only one speaker, but a speaker who so carefully conveys a sense of his audience that it seems almost a dialogue. Part of the joy of the reading, of course, is to see how quickly the reader can catch on to who is doing the speaking. These strategies give us poetry very different from — and far more interesting — than the exploration of some poet's consciousness or a poet's informing us of his or her changing states of mind. The poems deal with biblical characters and themes familiar to Selles's probable audience (though one hopes for a wide distribution of these poems) and, thus, create a tension between the reader's present understanding and the fresh nuances the poet invites him to entertain.

And it is these nuances — surprising, witty, at times daring — which bring delight on every page. Look how the poet burrows into the mind of the elder brother, for example. Superficially and insincerely he welcomes his brother back, tells how much he enjoyed the party ("we sang we ate/we were happy/so happy"). Then in a sudden shift of tone, a tone dripping with irony and menace, he reminds his sibling that since he, the sibling, has spent all his inheritance, the father's estate will now pass on to him, the faithful son who has done the grunt work on the place. He concludes, with a refreshing twist of a cliche, a strategy Selles uses in many of the poems: "of course I'm happy/to forgive you/but I will/never forget/you are now/my hired hand/and you will/never forget/that I'm happy/to be/my brother's keeper."



Mr. Selles has developed the habit of taking second looks at things. Abraham Kuyper's powerful reminder that every square inch of this universe belongs to Christ has shaped us all in ways that define us. But Selles probes this

formula and finds a way to say that some square inches are his, too — inches won by diligence and mastery: "my brain/ (sides both right and left)/did not complain as I/boiled it/ scooping off the foam/into my inch..." Not intimidated by Kuyper's blazing truth, Selles, with a delightful audacity, commandeers several related ideas and seats them as fellow passengers in Kuyper's train.

And we — at least, most of us — know what the acronym TULIP represents. With ease and charm he weaves each of these terms — total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints — into a stanza which enhances the meaning of these formulas. By means of this serious playfulness he reminds us of something very important — that the poetry of theology is grace — that when these doctrines stand in isolation as abstract propositions, their harshness does violence to the voice of the gospel.

In "Garden" he puts questions to Eve, as if he were a reporter — questions we may have thought of, too, but were afraid to ask. He likes also to play with words that have multiple meanings — cross, palm, stone, bread — playing variations on their basic meanings and suggesting their relevance for the Christian life. And I shall never forget Goliath's grumbling as he wakes up on what will prove to be his last day. What a boring life, he complains, as he suits up for another challenge to those cowardly Israelites: "do you notice how they tremble just because I'm a bit tall/watch them shake even more/when they hear my spiel/ as if they haven't heard it before ... I should just stay in bed tomorrow." But this day presents a novelty — a young boy, "as red as blood," first seems only to be playing in a brook nearby, but then advances towards him ... a minor irritation to be disposed of in short order.

"Family" is a delightful attempt to discover the right metaphor for a community linked by blood ties. A tree will go quite a ways — especially as it adds "another circle/to an ever widening trunk" (a metaphor reminiscent of John Donne). But perhaps a rope is better, "woven with every sort of cord ... all bound of one accord/into a single thread." Do you prefer the tree? Well, then, why not both? After all, "both/trees and cords can share knots/so our family can be a tree/if you allow me to attach a cord/and swing back and forth/and whistle with the leaves."

It remains to observe that the poet's sister, Geraldine Selles-Ysselstein, complements the poems forcefully by the relief prints she has supplied. Neal Plantinga furnishes a helpful Preface. These poems will grow on you. For all their subtleties of phrasing, their understatement, their quick darts of thought, these poems are accessible. This poet (he teaches in the French Department at Calvin College) does not strive for ambiguity as the essence of poetry. Out of respect for his reader, he strives to be understood. And his work leads to a pleasure of a high order. To redeem a cliche, Enjoy!