

A forum for Christian school educators

# *Christian Educators* Journal

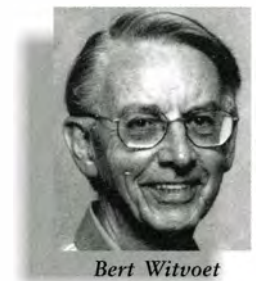
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Sports for Time and Eternity



## When a Body Meets a Body in the Race



Bert Witvoet

In his introduction to *Perspective for Physical Education in the Christian School*, Marvin A. Zuidema explains that “the task of physical education is to educate each student in the proper use of the body. The care of the physical body is a moral responsibility and part of our service to God.” A little earlier he writes that “each person is a divinely-created creature ‘who is soul *and* body, inner man *and* outer man, a conscious personal being *and* a biological one’” (he quotes Nick Wolterstorff).

I like that concept of the unity of body and soul very much. We are not bodies that have a soul; we are not souls that have a body; we are body and soul. No body can deny that. No soul can either. And with this strong linkage it’s not so hard to build a good foundation for physical education, the thematic topic of this issue of CEJ.

It means that whatever we do in phys. ed. class is of temporal and eternal significance. When we do sport and exercises the way they are meant to be done, we are reaping all kinds of benefits: helping bodies to be healthy, building community, developing skills, learning discipline and perseverance. I like the way John Byl in his article in this issue even talks of worshiping God through our involvement in sport and games. Wow! Talk about offering our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God in a spiritual act of worship. She shoots, she scores — hallelujah! He passes the ball, he misses the hoop — praise the Lord!

### Divine rules

What a challenge phys ed teachers in the Christian school face — integrating body and soul. Worshiping God in sport is not first of all a prayer before and after the game, though that is entirely appropriate. Rather, it is allowing God to set the rules by which we play (See articles by Glen Van Andel and Jong-il Kim). I have seen too many professional games where attempts to injure a valuable player is considered par for the course. That makes sense only if the over-arching goal is to win. Everything is deemed to be fair in love and war and sport because so much is at stake — honor, power, money.

When Christians engage in sport, they will have to confront these false gods with a lot of determination and insight. In fact, I find it difficult to conceive of a Christian being completely faithful to his calling and successful in her embodied witness while playing for a professional team. I once counseled a student against becoming a professional hockey player. He had potential, but I suggested to him that pursuing a puck on the ice as a career might not be the best way to answer God’s call. Whether my advice carried any weight I cannot tell, but I am pleased to know

that he became a psychotherapist.

At the same time, I believe that sport is a very important activity if engaged in for the right reasons and under the right circumstances. Sport

can make or break people, especially young persons in the process of having their character shaped. The effects of a young person’s engagement in sport can reach into old age.

### The power of anger

I’m thinking of a story I read about a Dutch immigrant, Okke Jansma, who lives in Highton, Australia. Okke relates that he sometimes experiences flashbacks from his youth in the old country while he pursues his woodworking hobby in the garage behind his house. He can suddenly find himself enveloped in a rage about something that took place more than 50 years ago. The anecdote that interests me has to do with a skating competition he took part in as a boy in Friesland. It shows that sport, like the rest of life, is not always worship, at least not worship of a loving God.

Okke was born into a family that had produced excellent skaters in the past, and he had inherited some of their skills. One

*“Worshiping God in sport is not first of all a prayer before and after the game”*

day, the local ice club held a skating race for school children. A stiff wintery north-eastern blew that afternoon. Okke was doing well. He had defeated Chris Zwart, whose uncle was a famous 11-city marathon winner. Chris had walked around earlier with a bit of an air because of that connection. But at this point his chest had fallen considerably. And now Okke had to face one more foe: his cousin Okke, the son of Teade. Both represented the same family champions.

Our Okke, Okke Jansma, remembers standing at the starting line, eyes filled with tears because of the cold wind. Through his tears he faintly saw at the end of the skating lane the little ship of Wiebe Paulusma, at anchor in the canal. Wiebe had once referred to Okke’s great-grandfather by his nickname Jabik Murd (Jake the Skunk). Suddenly Okke remembered that, and his mind filled with rage. How did that so-and-so dare to call his great-grandfather “Jake the Skunk.” As the start signal went off, Okke raced straight for the ship. He never saw the ice, he never felt the

ice. He was unaware of the competition. He screamed: "I'll kick you in your crotch with my pointed skates!"

And wouldn't you know it? Okke won the race and the competition. First prize!

But as he recalls the incident in his garage in Australia, years and years later, an empty feeling comes over him. There had been nobody at the end of the race to cheer him and to congratulate him. Not even his father had been there for him. He was always too busy and could not appreciate the value of supporting a son. And so this 60-some-year-old man in Highton, Australia, loses himself in his bitter-sweet memories. And there is no one there to say: "hallelujah!"

The story hits home at a deep level, of course. A seemingly insignificant little detail, like not being there for your children in their achievements, takes on gigantic proportions and emigrates all the way to Australia without a visa. What the story also shows is that anger can be a strong motivator in sport. Coaches know that, too. Some of them purposely try to evoke anger and develop a killer instinct in their players. I cannot imagine that this technique answers to the purpose of sport.

### The power of love

Of course, sport can be so beautiful. Marvin Zuidema quotes Galatians 5: 22-23a): "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." Yes, God, but does this fruit win any games in a sinful world? Okke Jansma may never have won his race against the other Okke if he had practiced any one fruit of the Spirit.

The futility of it all comes home when you realize that in either case an Okke would have won. The honor of the family would have been preserved. And the race could have been true worship.

What the story illustrates so powerfully, I think, is that Okke, too, is body and soul. His anger had fueled his body at the time of the race. Soul can do that. But now his body experiences the final outcome of anger. I can't imagine that unresolved pain and anger can be good for you in your retirement. No wonder Okke finds himself swearing suddenly without knowing at first why.

Life is one long training session and one long race, isn't it. We read in Ecclesiastes 9:11 that the race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong. A sobering message for those who seek triumphs in sport according to the Olympic motto: "Faster, Higher, Stronger." And in 2 Timothy, Paul, who has used the metaphor of the race and sport several times (Acts 20:24, 1 Corinthians 9:24, Galatians 2:2, 5:7) says at the end of his life and ministry: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing." I imagine that the crown of righteousness is like a sport trophy — a garland, a cup, a medal. But it goes to those who practice the fruit of the Spirit as they learn the proper use of the body.

Bert Witvoet

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# Can our children survive youth sports?

## Go! Fight! Win!

by Jong-il Kim and Glen Van Andel

*Jong-il Kim and Glen Van Andel are professors of physical education at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

Sports are a significant part of our culture. Sports often reflect some of the best but also some of the worst of our society. Researchers have identified many potential benefits of sport participation including physical, social, intellectual, psychological, and moral development. And yet we are all aware of the ugly side of sport — that dimension of it which fractures relationships between athletes, parents, coaches and fans.

Sports psychologist Terry Orlick describes the incongruous outcomes of sport participation this way: “For every positive psychological or social outcome in sports, there are possible negative outcomes. For example, sports can offer a child group membership or group exclusion, acceptance or rejection, positive feedback or negative feedback, a sense of accomplishment or a sense of failure, evidence of self-worth or a lack of evidence of self-worth” (Orlick, p. vii.).

So, what factors contribute to more positive outcomes, and how can we in the Christian community help shape these experiences for our students? Successful outcomes in sports participation depends on the success of triangular relationship between students, parents and coaches. Each

plays an important role, although parents and coaches act as supporters, encouragers, and mentors for the student who must remain at the top of the triangle. The greatest benefits will be achieved when the focus remains on the student rather than on who won or lost that game.

ing so we are fulfilling God’s plan and purpose for our lives.

But young athletes, just like young musicians, have to understand that participation in sport requires a commitment. Hard work and persistence are always difficult lessons to learn, especially when it seems

that skills of the game come easier to other teammates. It is to be hoped that these lessons can be learned in the context of a supportive and encouraging environment, a setting that rewards effort and improvement without undue comparisons with others.

Participation in sport has to be fun for the student athlete. Sheer enjoyment is the primary

reason close to 70 percent of young people give for participating in athletics, but too often they drop out of sports far earlier than necessary because it loses the spirit of playfulness that lies at its core. Play, we must remember, is a very fragile phenomenon that relies on a personal sense of freedom and intrinsic motivation for its life blood. Too much stress on winning, unrealistic performance expectations from parents or coaches, or other factors that contribute to a negative play environment will tend to erode or destroy the playful spirit of the young athlete. The source of pleasure and satisfaction may vary from student to student as the social types simply enjoy being with friends, while task-oriented youngsters enjoy the challenges of self-improvement as they train and per-



### The role of student athletes

Each person can say with the Psalmist, “For you (God) created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well” (Psalm 139:13 -14). As God’s handiwork, we all have gifts and abilities that we are called to develop and use to praise God our creator. Participation in sports provides youth with marvelous opportunities to discover and develop these abilities and to learn about themselves and others. Even the students who achieve only limited athletic success can develop a profound understanding of their own character and strengths through the experience. By do-

form in a given activity. Ability-oriented youth, on the other hand, enjoy competing and challenging themselves to be the best they can be. Understanding the different personality types can help youth and adults create more positive outcomes by structuring play experiences around these dominant themes.

### The role of parents

Parents also play a significant role in determining if their child's experiences in athletics will be positive. Supportive parents focus on reducing pressures which destroy the play experiences for young athletes and, in some cases, the spirit of the child herself or himself. First, parents need to encourage the joy of participation in the activity itself rather than becoming the number one athlete who will get an athletic scholarship. This means that parents will need to work with the child to help select the sport that matches his or her interest with abilities and physical body type. However, children frequently choose sports on the basis of sibling or peer models and therefore need encouragement to experiment with a variety of activities (Schock, 1987). At other times, parents or coaches want to restrict a child's involvement to one sport because of a desire to develop specialized sport skills. This, too, limits the child's ability to learn a variety of skills and should be avoided until upper grades in high school or college.

Supportive parents can inspire confidence in their athletically-involved children by praising them when they do well and encouraging them when they fail to reach their athletic goals. Above all, parents should avoid comparing a child's athletic performance to that of his or her siblings or friends. It may be appropriate to ask, "why do you think that person is doing so well?" and then talk about what the child might do to improve. "You can do it



better next time. Keep working hard" or "Your skill level is better than last week" are appropriate adult responses. Or, simply look for successful performances in some element of the activity and reinforce those specific areas of progress.

But because of the importance assigned to the culture of sports, parents may become overly involved in their child's activities. Our own egos can become so intimately connected with our child's performance that they begin to feel they have let us down if they make a mistake or strike out in a game. Supportive parents do not become obsessed with their child's athletic success or failure. Keeping a game a game should help to achieve the ultimate goal of youth sports, to have fun playing with peers and to develop skills that will help your child grow as a person.

### The role of coaches

Coaches, including Christian coaches, may have widely differing philosophies and

approaches. However, there are some basic principles that should guide Christian coaches. We need to recognize and value each person as an image bearer of God and show her or him the dignity and respect that person deserves. When we begin with this premise then several things happen:

Our coaching style reflects that of our servant leader Jesus Christ "who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking on the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness" (Philippians 2: 6-7). Such an attitude creates a powerful context for establishing an instructor/student relationship that is essential to teaching and learning.

The soul and spirit of the young athletes become more important for us than the skills they need to improve in a given sport. Therefore, they will need to feel my love and care for them as children of God, especially when they think they have failed. Dealing with failure is an essential part of the learning process, and our approach will contribute to the student's growth and maturity or self-doubt.

A coach must create an environment that is stimulating and fun, a place where both work and play are experienced in manageable doses and where unity and trust is developed among the players. Here it is safe to make mistakes as you learn new skills and test old ones. Good coaches help young athletes meet their need to have fun and feel self-worth by creating situations where everyone can experience some degree of success.

Success is an important part of sport participation, but it is measured by an athlete's personal improvement toward achieving personal and team goals rather than if he or she has won or lost. Personal goals should include developing Christian virtues such as diligence, courage, pa-



tience, honesty, charity, humility, justice, compassion and creativity. But none of this comes without great effort. Athletes need to know there is no short cut to success. Hard work and sacrifice are required to achieve excellence in any activity and success in athletics is no exception.

### A word about competition

But how does competition contribute to a positive play environment? Competition has a bad reputation in some quarters because of much publicized abuses of and damaging effects on young people. For example, when one of the authors was selected by his country to begin training at a state Olympic training camp at age 10, he was often fearful of letting down his parents, or being rejected by peers, or not liv-

ing up to performance standards set by the state and coaches. Self doubt and the overstress on performance can have a paralyzing effect on youth who don't have the support system to help them cope with these challenges.

While these and other problems certainly have been a part of athletics, competition should not be thrown out with the bath water. Rather, we should work to use competition in appropriate doses to motivate and encourage athletes to improve and develop their knowledge of themselves and the knowledge and skill of the game. A Christian understanding of competition stresses self-improvement over winning and mutual respect over put-downs. Indeed, competition is an integral part of sports and life and as such it has

the potential to contribute to our personal development and thus to help us become the people that God created and called us to be.

### Summary

Youth sports is an important part of our culture, and we need to seriously consider how they can be used to develop young people physically, emotionally, mentally, socially and spiritually. The student athlete, the parents, and the coaches all have a role to play in shaping the outcomes of sports participation. Christian principles and values are critical factors in defining and guiding the roles each of us play in the learning and teaching process. When we remain faithful to these principles, we are more likely to reflect the image of God and see evidence of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our play.

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# THE COACH AS SERVANT

by Jong-il Kim

My first year at a state training camp for runners in South Korea affected me negatively. I had bad sprinting techniques. One of the sprinting coaches gave me a mark after every practice. He also asked me to demonstrate my sprinting techniques in front of other sprinters. I thought he picked me because I was fast. I was wrong. He used me to show the other sprinters how bad my technique was. He told them I was breaking every possible sprinting rule in the book. "Don't sprint like Jong-il," he would tell the other runners. I was embarrassed and his approach hurt me for a long time.

But I did benefit from that painful experience. I learned first-hand that coaches should strive to appreciate each young athlete's God-given athletic talent, accept each young athlete as an individual, and treat him or her with respect and love. Each young athlete needs praise, encouragement, and positive reinforcement. Merely criticizing someone's performance will decrease that person's sense of self-worth and increase the fear of making mistakes. Most importantly, it will discourage a young athlete from continuing to participate.

When coaches praise athletes for their performance, they need to praise them with a sincere heart. However, when athletes don't perform well, coaches have to be honest and point out the fact that the young persons did not live up to their potential. Coaches should criticize bad performance, not individuals.

When I coach young athletes, I am guided by, and pursue, two main considerations: coaching objectives, and coaching styles. My coaching objectives include pointing

out individual improvement, teaching correct skills and techniques, and building up the intensity of a competitive spirit in preparation for important meets. Other objectives are teaching young athletes to respect the rules, opponents, teammates, and officials.

My coaching style reflects how I choose to lead and interact with my young athletes and affects how I motivate and discipline them. I am most likely to use a cooperative style. Occasionally, however, I become authoritarian, at other times merely passive. Thus my coaching employs a combination of these three styles.



*Jong-il Kim receives the championship trophy in South Korea.*

But a constant underlying my style is that I approach young athletes as a servant. Athletes are at the center of my attention. I focus on what skills they need to improve, I demonstrate these skills, and I help them master these skills. As a coach I strive for integrity and credibility. I demand the attention and respect of young athletes. And I season this approach with communica-

tion, motivation, praise and discipline.

I teach young athletes self-discipline, responsibility, and self-esteem. Success is very important in this society, but I emphasize that success is measured by each individual's personal improvement in athletics.

When young athletes have fun and recognize that they have the coach's attention, they are focused, excited and challenged. They will show feelings of enjoyment, satisfaction and enthusiasm. What is even more important, they will feel that they have worth. But this feeling of worthiness can be destroyed by the misconception that

in athletics winning is success and losing is failure in athletics. I have seen athletes lose confidence and their sense of self-worth because they misunderstood the meaning of success.

Too often athletes misinterpret making a mistake during competition or practice as failure. Coaches can inspire young athletes, meet their need to have fun and instill feelings of self-worth by creating situations where everyone can experience some degree of success. Coaches should teach young athletes that mistakes are natural and a necessary part of athletics and the learning process. Let the young athletes learn that they can master the skills they need through mistakes. Finally, coaches should also emphasize the importance of a good work

ethic. They should let young athletes know there is no short cut to success in athletics. Hard work and sacrifice are required for athletic excellence.

In the end, coaches are called to help athletes believe in themselves and in their ability to achieve their goals.





# THE BIGGER TOURNAMENT

by Keith Vanderzwan

*Keith Vanderzwan (keithv@rochester.rr.com) is principal at East Palmyra Christian School in Palmyra, New York. Keith writes of an experience that took place a few years ago.*

As we drove home with the East Palmyra Christian School girls' volleyball team from the All-Ontario Volleyball Tournament in Bowmanville, Ontario, Canada, I was reminded again of whose we are and who we must be as Christians in this world. Strange topic to think about, really, after all the competition on the volleyball court, all the cheering and smiles, all the noise and hyperactivity, all the waiting and scouting out the other teams.

One could expect that thinking about winning and losing after an intense tournament would be the thing to do. But God led my mind in other directions. I thought of how we as a team had represented our school, and our Lord. Had we been faithful to him? Not always, I guess. Perhaps we had fallen short in the tournament, where winning can become the over-arching goal of the day. But I also felt that in so many ways God had allowed us to be faithful to him on the court, in our play, and in our relating together. I hoped others had seen that in us.

I realized that we had honored God in other ways as well. God had used us for his kingdom, often when we weren't even aware of it. We were used to touch the lives of the people around us on and off the volleyball court.

We had stayed overnight at the home of a family that I knew from my days teaching at Durham Christian High School in Bowmanville. All their kids had grown up and had moved out of the house, and the entire upstairs of the house was ours. I had spoken to the lady of the house earlier to let her know how many of us to expect.

"Eleven of us altogether," I had said.

"Please let your students know that George had a stroke some time ago and that he is paralyzed on his one side and cannot speak," she had told me. "He just sits in a wheel chair and is completely dependent. I wanted your students to know this so they would not be shocked by him."

I thought back on how the students had reacted when we entered the house. They weren't shocked. I would say much more that they were loving and accepting. They sat on the floor of the family room that evening, chatting with each other and with George and Sylvia, and jostling on the sofa as if they were at home. And George and Sylvia loved them! A bond was formed in one evening and a morning between two sixty-something grandparents and a group of junior high school volleyball players from East Palmyra Christian.

Having learned the Canadian national anthem last year in my honor, the girls sang

it with the couple before we left them on Saturday morning. And George sang along. Every word he sang was audible and every note was on pitch! George was in his glory. A man who could not talk beyond his "one-two-three," sang along, word for word, note for note. And he smiled when we sang the American anthem. And when we sang the prayer "May the Lord bless you, may the Lord keep you, may the Lord lift up his face to shine on you," his heart sang.

The girls said their goodbyes and thank-yous, and George and Sylvia saw me to the door. George had tears in his eyes.

I was thinking about all this on our way home that Saturday. You know, it's not the perfect sets, the accurate spikes, or the hard serves that count very much in life. But it's when you touch the life of another person, that's when God's smile widens. Our girls won in more ways than on the court this weekend. They won a bigger tournament.

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## A COACH'S REFLECTION ON A WINNING SEASON

by Sean Schat

*Sean Schat wrote this article during the 2001-2002 school year when he was an English literature and drama teacher at Beacon Christian High School in St. Catharines, Ont. He coached the senior girls basketball team that year. This year he teaches at King's Christian Collegiate in Oakville, Ont., and he serves the Christian Educators Journal as regional editor for Eastern Canada.*

One of the things I love most about being called to *teaching* is the constant opportunity I have *learning* from my students, from my colleagues and through my own experiences and reflections. Because of the way I am wired, I tend to learn most powerfully from my students. They provided me with the impetus to tell this story.

This past fall [September to November, 2001], I had the privilege of coaching our senior girls basketball team. Despite the hectic schedule, I very much enjoyed spending time with this energetic and optimistic bunch. Their parents are blessed to have such fantastic daughters! I learned a lot from them.

What stood out for me this season was *not* our success on the basketball court — actually, we lost every blessed single game we played. But what really impressed me about these girls is the powerful testimony they gave, to me and to others, every time they stepped on the court, simply by being themselves. It was actually quite remarkable: after almost every single game we played within our division, someone, either a coach, a referee or a parent from another school, made a point of coming up to me, saying something positive about our team. It was *not* that they felt sorry for us, that they felt badly because we were a weak team; they were visibly moved by the way the girls handled themselves.

I heard comments about the following:

- the way we kept hustling from start to finish, refusing to give up regardless of the score.
- the way our team always seemed to be smiling and encouraging.
- the way our players would immediately check to see if opponents were OK after a collision or injury.
- the way we rose above the disrespect

shown by one of the teams we played (the referees made a point of stressing the character *that* displayed).

— what a neat bunch of girls they seemed to be — they looked like a lot of fun to coach.

In all these things, I was struck by two things:

1. Our girls displayed what I believe is the essence of Christian school athletics — do your best with the combined gifts of each individual on your team, play hard, respect the integrity of the game, treat all other participants (teammates, opponents, referees, fans) with all the respect owing them, and have fun.

2. The way in which our girls carried themselves testified that there was something different about them. And they did it by simply being themselves. This does not imply that Christians are better than anyone else (certainly as redeemed sinners we know this not to be the case), but it does demonstrate to me that these girls have been raised with love and grace, and they testify to it in the way they interacted with others on the basketball court.

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## Sports and the Industrial Model:

# *Citius Altius Fortius*

by John Byl

*John Byl is professor of physical education at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ont.*

"Citius, Altius, Fortius" is Latin for "Faster, Higher, Braver." It's the mission statement for both modern industrialism and sport. Officially it is the Olympic motto, though the IOC has changed "Braver" to "Stronger" in an effort to distance the motto from its roots. But why talk about industrialism and sport in the same sentence? How are they related?

Let me explain with an example. One highly skilled bowler once told me that "to be a top-notch bowler one needs to become more like a machine. If you looked at a film of a top-notch bowler and showed a number of throws simultaneously in an over-lapping manner, you should not see any differences — each throw should be exactly the same." *Assembly line precision is the goal of sport.* Irregularities from the assembly line are relegated to the reduced bin. In the same way irregularities in sport are relegated to less than gold. As a Nike ad once said, "You don't win silver, you lose gold." Sports often mirror the mode of production.

It is also interesting that in North American countries,

where democracy is highly valued, the organization of manufacturing and sport are both typically autocratic. In industry, bosses through various mediators tell workers what to do; in sport, coaches tell athletes what to do. It seems our neo-Marxist theorists are right when they talk about the mode of production deterministically affecting all other areas of life (Sage, 1998). We have to ask hard questions as Christians to see if we are both in the world and of it. Have we syncretistically adopted a view of life that is shaped more by busi-

ness practice than by the Word?

### Child labor

Let's try another example. At what cost are entrepreneurs willing to make a profit? During the period of industrialization in the late 1800s, it was economically advantageous for owners to exploit children for economic gain and use them as a cheap labor force. Others organized a fight against this kind of exploitation of children. Although Western culture has minimized the oppression of children in industry what are we doing in sport? In some sports nine-year-olds can compete for national championships, and twelve-year-olds can participate in the Olympics. Do these children have a childhood left? Are we allowing children to be children, or are they being used in our culture's drive for faster, higher, stronger in ways industrialism did 100 years earlier? We have a minimum age for children to enter the work force. Would it not also be helpful, for the sake of letting children be children, to have a minimum age for National championships and Olympic participation?

Would we rather see extremely flexible gymnasts who are robbed of their childhood, or less flexible gymnasts whose childhood has been preserved? But let me bring this ex-





ploitation of children a little closer to home. Do we treat elementary school athletes according to a professional sports model, with cuts and varying amounts of playing time, or do we encourage a nurturing, educational model for as many students as possible, letting each one learn more about the game?

### Media's role

I remember teaching a high school physical education class. Everything was going great. Then we began a unit on floor hockey and fists began to fly. When we stopped to talk about what was going on, the immediate reply was, "This is hockey!" What they meant to say was: this is commercialized professional hockey. They mimicked a violent professional spectacle, the kind of action that takes place in a dog-eat-dog environment and replicated that in the school. It was an important opportunity for discussion and for eliciting the conclusion that the meaning of something ought not to come from professional spectacle but from God. People involved in classroom hockey and professional hockey both need to understand that fulfilment comes by recognizing our dependence on God and our need to honor God (Romans 11:36).

But how did these high school students conclude that "this is hockey?" One of the most powerful forces in developing our thinking is the mass media. Sage, a neo-Marxist sport sociologist, reminds us that most people view sport broadcasts as an "objective mirror of the reality of the contest." But they are wrong. Sportscasters are "interpreters of its [sport] meanings, and a crucial means by which a hegemonic ideology is propagated and produced" (Sage, 1998, 174). This ideology is one in which masculinity is espoused and subordination

of women perpetuated (just think of how little is devoted to female sport in your local newspaper). These attitudes accept and encourage violence through the likes of Don Cherry (commentator for CBC Hockey Night in Canada) and "Rock em, Sock em" hockey videos.

There is nothing new about violence in this world. The painful reality of broken relationships was evident soon after creation when Cain killed his brother Abel, both sons of Adam and Eve (Genesis 4:8). Yet this violence and "killer instinct," this universal and pervasive disposition of people to turn their back on God, is perpetuated through media. Ask yourself: Is the way we engage in sport a celebration of God's gifts, or a consumptive, human-centered, exploitative experience that takes glory away from God and causes creation to groan (Romans 8:22)?

### Defining our terms

Is the solution, then, to get away from all professional and commercialized sport? To answer that, I think it is helpful to define our terms and distinguish from among playful games, sport and athletics.

Playful games involve the backyard one-on-one basketball games between father and son, where the son tries a behind-the-back-between-the-legs dribble and does a 20 foot hook shot over a struggling dad and they both split their guts laughing when the ball scores with nothing but mesh. These games resemble the kind of play engaged in by a frolicking Leviathan in Psalm 104. Playful games are more interested in goofing around than in successfully overcoming the game's obstacles.

Athletic games involve the skillful execution of carefully rehearsed plays such as the shoot set in volleyball, where the middle-

hitter crushes the ball with no one there to block her — the kind of rehearsed skill that the Benjamites had when they "could sling a stone at a hair and not miss" (Joshua 20:16). Athletics is more focused on accomplishing the task than goofing around. Sporting games involve skillful but less rehearsed execution and plenty of laughter at successful and unsuccessful attempts.

Sporting games balance goofing around with successfully overcoming the game's obstacles.

I believe that the tension between God and the Devil is not solved by moderation, nor is it solved by pitting goofing around (the Devil) against using our talents (God), or by pitting competition (the Devil) against cooperation (God). God claims every piece of gymnasium hardwood and playing field grass, every outburst of joyful laughter and cry of defeat, every playful game and athletic accomplishment. Can that be done through physically active game participation?

### Game participation as worship

Paul urges us, "in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:1-2). It is neat to think of participation in physically active games as an opportunity for worship, a spiritual act of worship. Gordon Dahl made an informative observation when he stated that in our North American Culture we "work at our play, play at our worship, and worship our work." Instead, we need to work at our





work, play, and worship; we need to play at our play, worship, and work; we need to worship God through our worship, work, and play.

Worship begins with our understanding that our physicalness is a gift from God. Man and woman, boys and girls, are created by God in God's image, and in their wholeness they were created "very good." God provided for Adam and Eve (and for us) so that they could sustain themselves and fully enjoy the very goodness of all that God had made; and "there was evening, and there was morning — the sixth day" (Genesis 1:31). Our rebellion against God causes a great amount of misery and unhealthiness, but there is hope. Christ says, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). God wants to change all things through Christ.

### The benefits

Some of the details of how to worship God through our game participation are outlined in other articles in this issue. Done well, physical activities can generate many benefits. They include leadership development, fun experiences, health promotion, social cohesion, achievement gains, and character development. Research on children found that those who participate in organized physical activities tend to have higher self-esteem, interact better with friends, and become positive leaders. Those people involved in physical activity games experience less anxiety and depression and generally exhibit enhanced feelings of well-being and life satisfaction.

The fun of games is healing! Involvement in physical-activity games has obvious health benefits including positive effects on type 2 diabetes and bone mineral density (especially important to females). Participation minimizes obesity and lowers risks of heart diseases. Those involved in physi-

cal activities are often better able to let their hair down and are less likely to report having difficulty in relationships with friends than those who are less active. Research has also demonstrated that those who are involved in physical activities tend to have fewer academic difficulties and greater feelings of self-confidence. In that light, what school can afford not to offer opportunities for such games to its students?

The research on character development is mixed. Where winning is the main purpose of a program, character development occurs in a negative manner. Where participation is the emphasis of a program, positive character development occurs. (Byl, 2002, 8-10).

If students are to gain benefits from games that involve physical activity, our attitudes need to be shaped by the Word of God, not the corporate-commercial world. We need to develop programs through informed and careful Spirit-led, Word-breathed, and Father-sensitive considerations, not the ones based on professional or commercial sport models. Taking these steps takes courage and creativity, but the benefits are large, and God is honored through our faithfulness.


Preserving our physical well-being is a part of abundant living, a part of glorifying God with all that we are, a part of redeeming this world for God. As we do our part in God's kingdom we are also reminded of the new heaven and new earth.

The Bible does not say a lot about the new heaven and new earth, but it does look forward to a time when in the new Jerusalem "the city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there" (Zechariah 8:5). We also read how the "infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child will put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain" (Isaiah 11:8-9). The new heaven and new earth will be an amazing experience. May our leadership and involvement in physical-activity games provide us with a foretaste of these amazing experiences today.

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# Slouching Toward Bedlam

## The Waist-Land or The Love Song of G. "Tubby" Winkle

*Jan Kaarsvlaam, after a mishap at Lake Worth Christian School where he appeared in a chapel wearing a cape and leopard skin leotard, with a rose gripped between his teeth, began chapel by shouting, "I am Captain Beefheart the Magnificent!" He had planned to speak on the importance of physical fitness, but he never made it past his introduction before high school principal Robert Hook shut down the lights and sound system. He has since taken a position as poet-in-residence at the Denver Christian Schools.*

"I've had it with that Rex Kane!" said Sam Toomer, his lips pressed together so tightly they seemed to disappear altogether. "Do any of you know what he is doing right now?" Toomer looked out over the teachers' lounge. Jane VanderAsch was correcting papers, Gordon Winkle was gnawing on a radish he had found in the crisper drawer of the faculty refrigerator, Red Carpenter was reading the golf scores in the paper, and John Kleinhut was looking at the back of the old microwave on the counter, trying to figure out if it was leaking radiation. No one paid the least attention to Toomer's outburst.

"I hate rabbit food," Winkle muttered to no one in particular. Carpenter, without ever taking his eyes from the sports section, reached behind his chair, pulled open the refrigerator, grabbed a half-empty jar of caramel sauce left over from the fall faculty mixer, and slid it down the table to Winkle. Winkle's eyes lit up as he dipped the radish into the jar. A little string of caramel caught in his mustache.

Sam Toomer slammed the biology textbook he was carrying

down on the table. "Aren't any of you even listening to me? Rex Kane, at this exact moment, is having a donut break with his advanced P.E. class while showing them a movie about good dietary choices. How can I teach my kids that their body is a wondrous machine created by God, when he, who is supposed to be responsible for teaching them to maintain that body, is stuffing them full of saturated fats and sugars!" By this point,

Toomer was screaming at the top of his lungs, but he still seemed to have no lips. Gord Winkle, without even looking up from the radish he was carefully coating with caramel, muttered, "Come on, Sam, Rex does okay."

"Oh, you're one to talk, tubby," Sam said, "stuffing your face full of caramel." At the word "tubby," an eerie silence descended on the room. Carpenter, his eyebrows arching in surprise, laid down the paper and VanderAsch, her red pen momentarily stilled and glinting in the dull fluorescent glow of the room, watched Winkle and Toomer with a predatory eye. Gord, who had just brought the caramel-coated radish to his mouth, froze, little lines of hurt creeping up around his eyes.

"I mean what's the point of having a P.E. Department if this is what

that department does?" Sam continued, too angry at the moment to care that he had hurt Gord's feelings. "He feeds the kids donuts, he has them wax his car, they play board games. On a good day, he tosses out a ball and tells them to play some game while he works the crossword puzzle or surfs the Internet. If that's what P.E. class is, then I say we abolish the department."

John Kleinhut pulled his head out from the dusty recesses of



the back of the microwave. Though he had been unable to find any signs of radiation leakage, he had persuaded himself that this omission was a sure sign that the microwave was somehow leaking in a way that simply could not be detected. He had, however, unbeknownst to himself, discovered a massive dust ball clinging to the back of his head. "Let me tell you something, Toomer. If you want to decide how everyone teaches their classes, you can just go ahead. But I for one prefer a school where each teacher can be given the freedom to teach their own discipline to their own strength. I'd rather not have to worry that Big Brother is watching."

"Besides," put in Red Carpenter, one of Bedlam's English teachers, "We teach a lot about physical fitness through extracurricular sports, like my golf team. Say, did ya see the article about us in the paper?"

VanderAsch snorted. "Physical fitness and golf in the same sentence? You must be a former student of Rex's."

"Hey, golf is a tough game. It takes terrific hand-eye coordination."

"Indeed," said Jane as she laid down her pen and turned hawk-like gaze on Carpenter, "and so do most video games, but I don't think too many people would consider Nintendo a form of exercise that promotes cardiovascular fitness."

Carpenter shot back at her defiantly: "You're more right than you realize. In fact, Rex told me at lunch last week that he's creating a new two-week video game unit for the sophomore boys. He's lined up different students who will bring in the game consoles from home."

"Point, set, and match to me," said Toomer. He dropped dejectedly into a chair, the air-spring beneath the cushion seeming to heave a sympathetic sigh. "All I'm saying is that, although I don't mind teaching fitness, it seems to me that the phys. ed. department ought to teach it too."

Maxwell Prentiss-Hall spoke up. He had quietly entered the room during Carpenter's outburst. "It seems to me that we could certainly do more with the fitness aspect of our phys. ed. curriculum. In the counselors' offices we talk a lot about girls suffering from bulimia and anorexia, and those are serious problems, but an equally serious problem, which no one here seems to address, is the number of overweight kids. We aren't teaching kids to honor God with their bodies, to be physically fit. You know, Red, you talk about teaching fitness through golf, but sometimes I think you guys do more teaching of competition than you do of fitness. Games always seem to be about beating the other guy." Maxwell then swallowed nervously. He was unaccustomed to taking part in any discussion that even threatened to turn into an argument.

"Ever hear of survival of the fittest? Competition and fitness are the same thing," said Red Carpenter, with some disdain for anyone who wouldn't know that.

"No, Red, they aren't." Maxwell paused to gulp again, then continued. "You know that I run triathlons. I don't run them to prove that I am better than anyone else — I run them to prove to myself that I can do it."

"But you *can't* do it. You have never finished one of those triathlon things, have you?"

"It's not my fault," said Maxwell, "it is just that I don't like to swim."

Jane laughed derisively. "That's pathetic, Max. It's like saying I like teaching; it's a great job except for the part where I have to work with the kids."

"Listen," said Winkle, casting a spiteful glance toward Toomer, "as someone here so rudely pointed out earlier, I am part of the big-boned set. I take offense at the notion that my body somehow dishonors God." Everyone in the room felt uncomfortable, but when Red Carpenter noticed the caramel still clinging to Gord's mustache, he could not help smiling. He coughed and buried his face in the newspaper again.

Kleinhut poured himself a cup of coffee, drank one small sip, and then stared suspiciously at the cup. As he did so, he scratched at the back of his neck where his fingers discovered the dust ball which he mistook for hair.

"My hair's falling out," he shrieked. "I knew it! I knew these microwaves were leaking radiation!" Dropping his cup in the sink, he ran from the room. Kleinhut's paranoia, if nothing else, eased the tensions in the room. Sam smiled sadly and turned to Winkle.

"I'm sorry, Gord. I shouldn't have called you names. I was upset. I just don't know what to do about Rex Kane."

At which point the subject of all the debate, the focus of all this ruckus, the center of the brouhaha, the locus of this donnybrook, the point of this fracas, the eye of the analogical hurricane, the epicenter of this braying cacophony, strode calmly into the room, resplendent in a lime green sweat suit.

"Hey, hey, hey," Rex said, thrusting a Dunkin' Donuts box toward his colleagues. "Who wants a donut?"



# Dr. Runner:

## *A Life-changing Teacher*

by May Drost

*May Drost (wdrost@sleepy.ebtech.net) is a retired teacher of English, a writer and a member of the CEJ Board of Trustees. She lives in Sarnia, Ont.*

*May Drost delivered a speech at a conference to honor the memory of Dr. H. Evan Runner, former professor of philosophy at Calvin College. The conference was held at Redeemer College in Ancaster, Ont., on October 4 and 5 this year. We reprint May's speech with her permission.*

Whenever I reminisce with my contemporaries about the old days at Calvin College, the conversation inevitably comes around to Dr. Runner. And when it does, I always feel a bit like a gushing groupie because, along with so many others, I find myself saying that Dr. Runner was one of the teachers who changed my life. Now that I have been a part of the Christian school system in Ontario for over 35 years, and have survived many a reality check, I realize more than ever the power of the kick start my teaching career got in those philosophy classes on the old Franklin Street campus in Grand Rapids.

### Faith vitality

At first Runner's classes were merely interesting for me. He bounced into his lectures as though he had just chewed down a boxful of chocolate-covered coffee beans and was working off the caffeine. If the sun was shining through the windows at the right angle, you could see the spittle fly, and you always wondered if his glasses

would survive the lecture hour because he swung them around so much, and used them in physical demonstrations of the points he wanted you to understand. His clever puns and turns of phrase added to the entertainment factor.

Soon I realized that I was not being en-

furthermore, that I could make a difference and help transform the culture I was a part of. (You can tell that I was almost as naive when I graduated from Calvin as when I started there.)

### The legacy

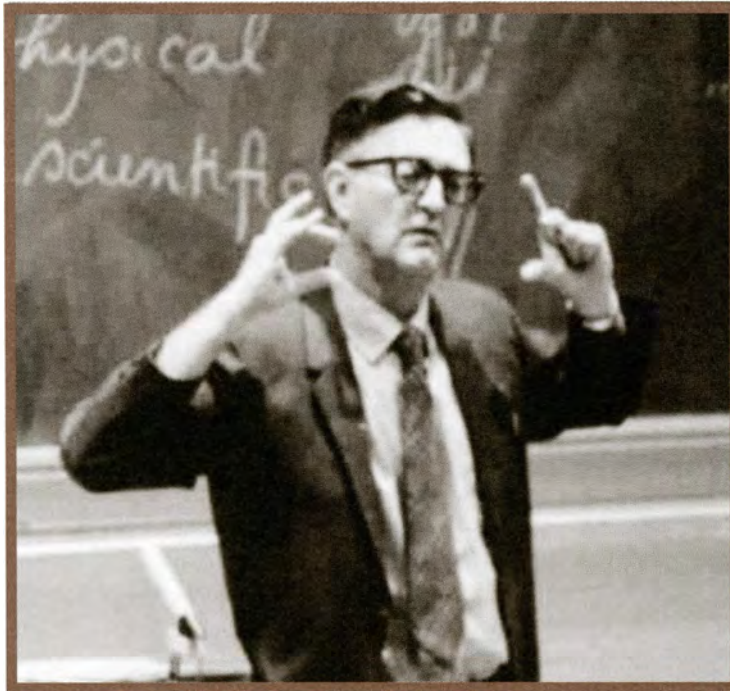
When I became a teacher and a member of the Ontario Christian School Teachers Association, I met many colleagues who, like me, were struggling to parlay the "life is religion" slogan into curricular reality, and who were ready to stomp on dualism wherever it reared its ugly head in educational texts and practice. We went to the Unionville conferences [organized by the Association for Reformed Scientific Studies] in the summer to revitalize ourselves by tanking up on ideas we could use in our teaching and curriculum design. We attended Friday night sessions at London Christian High where Dr. Hendrik Hart [a Runner protégé] walked us through the educational philosophy of John Dewey and others. In those

early times, I know there were teachers who actually introduced the modalities to their high school students! (Age-appropriate instruction may not have been a big thing in those days.)

Our Christian school system has grown up some since those early days, as all worthy institutions must. Still, there is evidence that we have embraced the legacy of which Dr. Runner was such a vital part. We have this legacy to thank for the following:

- \* that we teachers serve in schools by and large culturally engaged rather than merely separatist or protectionist.

- \* that our professional journal, *The Chris-*



tertained so much as engaged: I was being taught by a person who had faith in the Lord and who could demonstrate what difference that made beyond simply moral behavior and adherence to a set of religious principles. Faith made sense when Dr. Runner talked about it. He showed me, a spiritually naive eighteen-year-old, with eye-popping clarity, that all of life is religion. Things fell together for me, religiously speaking, and I made profession of faith in my senior year at Calvin, firmly believing that my faith in the truth of Scripture would determine and inform all the choices I would ever make in my life and,

*tian Educator's Journal*, addresses current issues which nevertheless relate directly or indirectly to the paradigmatic questions: What does it mean to be a school in the Reformational tradition? How can we capitalize on that heritage and move on from there?

\* that through the Ontario Alliance, teachers are turning out study units which recognize and respect the seamless nature of created reality.

\* that we're paying more and more attention to *how* we deliver education, honoring the idea that an integrated curriculum is probably a good reflection of an integrated universe.

### Keep on reforming

Now that many of our schools answer to constituencies representing Lutheran, Catholic, Baptist, Pentecostal and other Christian traditions and many members of the Ontario Christian School Teachers Association are in fact part of these other traditions — we are impelled to examine ever more carefully which aspects of our collective current practice reflect biblical truth, and which ones we must let go. This brings us back to another part of Dr. Runner's legacy: *semper reformanda*, always reforming. The truth is not static: it is a way of life. Change and development

are part of it.

Before I started college, I used to think that truth was propositional in nature. That meant all I had to do was find the right answer. I thank God that Dr. Runner got to me (and many of my peers) before I was let loose on students of my own. About teaching, this is what I learned from Dr. Runner first and foremost: The truth and the facts are not the same thing. Never mind the answers. First of all learn to ask the right questions!

Dr. Runner, you asked so many good questions in your lifetime. We owe you, and we envy you for now knowing the answers as well.

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## Can Teachers Be Effective Models?

*Clarence Joldersma (cjolders@calvin.edu) professor of education at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich., asked the Dot Edu panel to consider the question of teachers being role models. "Thinkers such as Nicholas Wolterstorff have often said that modeling is an important ingredient in the teaching process," says Joldersma, "especially in teaching 'values' or 'virtues.' Is such modeling possible? Is it effective? Is it desirable? Or is this asking for something impossible from teachers and an intrusion into a domain that really is part of the teacher's private realm?"*

November 13, 2002

Jesus said: "Everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40b). The Apostle Paul enjoined the Corinthians: "Be followers of me, even as I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). And he told the Philippians: "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me — put it into practice" (Phil.4:9). We are commanded to be role models. Modeling is possible, in fact, it happens all the time, whether we like it or not. That is why Paul prays that we "walk worthy of the Lord to please him in every way." We are a light to the world, a lamp on a stand and a salt to liven up our culture. I hope everyone is watching us as we teach. May we bring honor to our Lord!

Johanna



Johanna Campbell

November 14, 2002

I agree with Johanna. Modeling is how we learn much of what we know. Of course this is pretty frightening for teachers (and parents). However, I believe knowing that children are following our example pushes us to be better than we would be otherwise. Isn't it wonderful how this works reciprocally? We help children follow the Lord, and they help us strive to live lives more in keeping with his example. That is why we want the best people to be teachers. We want people who live a life of humble obedience.

Pam



Pam Adams

November 15, 2002

Who can disagree? I would only add this: my friend and col-

league Ray Vander Laan would encourage us to consider the ancient Jewish model of education. In that context the disciple (or student) was passionately committed to be like his rabbi (or teacher). It was a deeply relational activity. In our context, the student, then, would be committed to be like his or her teacher ... who has spent a lifetime becoming more like his or her rabbi, Jesus. This, it seems to me, is the heart of modeling.

Tim



Tim Hoeksema

November 19, 2002

Tim, the relationship piece was my take too. Craig Dykstra wrote about moral education and the Christian teacher. He, too, links modeling and the internalization of virtues with a "mutuality of sharing" within a relationship. This suggests that modeling virtues takes place person-to-person over time. He also writes of the importance of presenting students with issues or scenarios and letting them wrestle with these with a teacher's guidance and observations and examples, guidance rather than direct instruction.

Finally, he talks about the teachers bringing their whole selves into this relationship, implying their whole worldview, struggles, concerns, values and dispositions. This does not mean baring all their struggles, sins and souls to students. Rather, this suggests sharing how their own worldview influences their responses and impels their virtues in a situation where the topic is appropriate, where the student needs to hear and see a virtuous example. Finally, my own thinking is influenced by my experience with teenagers, who are quick to decry folks who do not practice what they preach. Teachers must be aware of the impact of their actions and choices on their students. Virtues will be noticed!

Lois



Clarence Joldersma

## November 21, 2002

So, being a godly role model means that our first desire is to please our Lord in every way, bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God. This is worked out relationally as we rub shoulders with our students. They, in turn, keep us humble by being quick to point out inconsistencies, which drives us to God again for renewed strength, forgiveness and joy, thanking him for the privilege we have of being his ambassadors.

Johanna

## November 26, 2002

Okay, so we're agreed that modeling happens and is even probably desirable. I wonder, then, what the models in Christian schools end up portraying. Are we models of people who have grabbed the fabric of life and are shaking the fullness out of it? Are we modeling a view of life here on the earth which God created for us that reflects a joy in abundant living? Or do we "edit" ourselves so that students get a sense that a truly Christian life is one lived with eyes averted and pleasures denied? Are we getting delightfully dirty in the work of the Kingdom, or sitting demurely in our Sunday best awaiting a heavenly kingdom?

Tony



Tony Kamphuis

## November 28, 2002

Tony, we are getting our clothes dirty, but not spotted by the flesh. We are not in Sunday attire, but we are awaiting a heavenly kingdom. That's the tension! We work, wonder, explore, get involved, serve the downtrodden, lift up the weary, all the while waiting eagerly with expectant faces for our Lord's return. God does not want our hypocrisy. Check out Isaiah 58, which explains the kind of fast that pleases God. We are very busy loosing chains of injustice, untying yokes, setting the oppressed free, sharing our food, shelter and clothes, and building relationships with our own flesh and blood. That's hard work! Luther is alleged to have said: "If the Lord should return tomorrow, I'll plant a tree today." We don't want to be too heavenly minded that we're no earthly good, but we still keep our eyes up, radiantly expecting our Lord's return.

Johanna

## November 29, 2002

Tony, in the swirl of school life, perhaps we adults can provide our students with glimpses of ways to respond as Christians to each other, to issues and to events. Practicing what we preach. Could we show how to relate to "our neighbor" by ourselves relating to our students with respect and consistent responsiveness? Could we show how to relate to our vocations and passionate interests, in our case, our profession, by taking the high road with our work, consistently developing engaging lessons that focus on understandings, and by challenging our students and ourselves to do our best in the classroom? Could we model how to work and live "in community" by basing our school setting and collaboration with colleagues and parents on Ephesians 4, living in peace as much as possible? Will our good humor, thoughtfulness, wittiness, liveliness reflect our vision to our students? This is the kind of gentle modeling that can set strong examples for students. Perhaps the school adult example can become a memory of actions and caring that blends with peers and parents, media and church, and all the other people influences in our students' lives.

Lois



Lois Brink

### 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

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Smithville, Ont.



*Christian Educators Journal February 2003 19*



## ROOM 219

# Silence



Nancy Knol  
Column Editor  
njkno@aol.com

by Nancy Knol

*Nancy Knol will not be writing about middle school anymore, and her column will no longer be known as "Thinking Thirteen." It's been several years since she has worked at that level. She is a teacher of English and Religion at Grand Rapids Christian High. You can find her most days in Room 219. Hence the heading of this column. And what a wonderful room it is. The editor visited her classroom last year and found himself surrounded by amazing artwork hanging on the walls. And on the blackboard a student had written "I love you, Mrs. Knol." It's especially that testimony that makes Room 219 special.*

We are studying great novels in my 11th-grade Modern Fiction class, novels like *The Grapes of Wrath*, *A Farewell to Arms*, and *The Chosen*. If you have ever read *The Chosen* by Chaim Potok, you know that an important key to understanding the novel is exploring the theme of silence. Hasidic Jew Danny Saunders has been brought up in silence by his father, and at one point in the novel he tells his friend Reuven Malter that he can actually "hear silence." Intriguing.

I decided to give my students an opportunity to earn some extra credit: they were to take a vow of silence for a 24-hour period and write an essay describing their experience and suggesting what they had learned. Some, of course, joked about when they would do it — on a Saturday when they basically sleep all day anyway — but I urged them to do it as a learning experience, so that they could actually practice silence, not simply avoid talking. Here are a few samplings of their conclusions:

"The biggest thing that disturbed me about this assignment was how incredibly shallow we have all become. When I had wanted to speak, the thoughts in my head were not even worth saying in the long run! What was said in the halls and at the beginning and end of classes was so pointless and oftentimes dripping with gossip; it did not even seem worthwhile for me to join in the conversation. It was a bit discomfoting to see my friends standing in a circle talking about downright nonsense and then to note the lack of true attentiveness of the receivers of the conversation. It got me to wondering how I react in a situation like that."

"It humored me that the people around me, especially those closest to me, felt the need to make up for my silence by being twice as loud and talking twice as much as they normally would.... It seemed strange to see how much influence silence can have on people. My friend just could not stand it that I was not talking to her; she needed verbal verification of our friendship."

"In silence I can examine my life, and take the best course of action because the time and background of silence motivates me

to do so. I have learned that silence motivates action."

"Is God speaking to me more in silence? Or am I hearing him better because silence turns down the volume on me?"

"I need silence like I need sleep."

"Some people avoid silence like it's the flu or something. I am beginning to see silence as my friend."

These and many more responses got me thinking about how comfortable I am with silence, privately, and in my own classroom. As a teacher whose task it is to explore the power of words, I am sometimes too dependent on them. Much can be communicated through silence.

A look directed at a student to remind him or her of something about inappropriate behavior speaks effectively and eliminates undue embarrassment.... A mutual understanding of the power of something that has been read or shared need not have any words attached to them. The genuine silence in the classroom as someone speaks, where the other students set aside their own urgent need to be heard next is a gift.... These are just a few examples that come to mind



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# CHRISTIAN ARTISTS:

## Called to Be Fully Human

by Calvin Seerveld

Calvin Seerveld is Senior Member (emeritus) in philosophical aesthetics at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, Ont. This article is from part of one of the talks he gave at the conference for Christian art teachers in Blue Mountains, NSW, Australia, in July 1999. It is reprinted here with permission from the Christian Teachers Journal of Australia. Seerveld is best known for his books on art: *A Christian Critique of Art and Literature* (revised edition, Dordt College Press, 1995) and *Rainbows for the Fallen World* (1980).

I spell creativity “d-i-s-c-i-p-l-i-n-e.” I believe “inspiration” is a hoax, and artists who accept the Western Romantic of needing to be “inspired” and “creative” have bought into a bankrupt bank and really handicapped themselves in the performance of their task because it inflates and isolates themselves as artist.

It is worth noting that the Older Testament word *to be creative* (bara) is used only with reference to God. Humans “fashion” (asah) things, “make” houses, melodies, carvings, poems. So, if you are trying to be “creative,” do something new, “out of nothing,” you are trying to be like God — which is a wrong-headed, inflated notion of artistry if I ever heard one.

Further, the supposition that as artist you need to be “creative,” doing “inspired” stuff or performances, is usually associated with

the idea of “genius.” A genius is above the crowd of ordinary blokes — journeymen, talented women — you are special, self-generating. So you are on your own. “Creativity” puts the pressure on artistically isolated you to come through with something

novel, or fail all by yourself because “inspiration” did not strike.

So my initial suggestion to you is: don’t put the pack of “creativity” on your back. Walk around free, unencumbered, as a working artisan trained to see nuances in the world. Artists are called by God to be professional imaginers in society, skilled at bringing surprising insights to their neighbors’ attention. Doing art is a certain kind of job: you don’t have to be “creative.”

### Art making process

My art is rhetoric. I make speeches and song texts. So you get a topic (whether assigned or chosen) or an initial idea, experience or question.

Step 1: You research the matter, get others’ thoughts and feelings on the topic, play around with the idea, consider it in different contexts — this is a fun time. Your imaginativity is let loose without any need to pin things down.

Step 2: You reflect on the whole works and all the stray insights you’ve been collecting, and organize roughly the contours to your forthcoming remarks.

Step 3: You start writing, carefully. Three hundred words is a good day for me — I “secrete text line by line” (elegy poet Gray) — and it always heads off somewhere you hadn’t planned. Great, keep going, but just take care you don’t paint



“Noah sent out ...” woodcut by Chris Stoffel Overvoorde



yourself into a corner.

Step 4: Deadline pressure grows; there's frustration at the slowness and fear of failure; and you become irritable and troublesome to family and friends. Finally, after a week or more of struggling, you start praying foxhole prayers to God for help — "I'm doing this for you, Lord...."

Step 5: You stay up all night; endorphins kick in; you get a high; you write down 500, 800 or 1000 words; and you finish things on the airplane, a tense wreck but passionate about getting the piece right.

That's a pattern as artist I've gone through for 35 years. It still doesn't come easier. You wish you could skip right to the endorphins. I wonder whether this pattern is idiosyncratic to me or somewhat standard for imaginative artistic deeds:

1. playful exploration
2. thoughtful organization, sensing or finding connections
3. beginning formulation, or practicing performance or tentatively compose
4. obstacles: fatigue, tension, noise, distraction, self-doubt
5. persevering to some kind of conclusion.

Making art, like leading a political party or kneeling for genuine prayer to God, is work: living out a task, fulfilling a chosen responsibility in ordinary, regular ways. To realize that artistry is ordinary work would demystify art and make the problems of obstacles more manageable.

Years ago, my wife and I visited a writer I knew; we stayed over-night on our trip through the Smoky Mountains in Tennessee. We woke up next morning to the sound of his typewriter pecking away. He went to work early on his fiction because he was hosting visitors who would take time away from his writing. The novelist Larry Woiwode has a rule for working out in his writing shed, away from the farmhouse, for five or six days every week: so many words, or eight hours a day, whichever comes first. You don't wait for "inspiration"; you sit behind the typewriter or word

processor, or go to your studio where the sketch pad and paints or clay are, and take up your pen or pencil and write, doodle, wonder, chew the eraser.

### **Staying fresh in one's regular task**

How do you stay fresh in your job of making art? One answer is: be human. What I mean is: realize and take seriously that as a human being you are more than an artist.

You as a person cannot help but be living in different dimensions of God's world for creatures (see diagram).

You have a physique, a measure of health, feelings, certain skills, an ability to imagine, speak, think, be sociable (more or less), spend your resources, be loyal to your fellow gang members or nationality and have an opening for friendship, and the horizon of piety or impiety.

You may be born with a defective kidney, have an extremely high IQ, walk around with abused feelings, and be so uncertain of yourself you are continually scatological or dirty in your talk. But you are always on call as a human being all these ways — somehow. And, in my book, you are an artist if you specialize in imagining and you get training in the skills to bring it off — to walk across the theater stage like an actor rather than as a pedestrian, to voice a song so people listening say to themselves, "What's that throb of tones I hear?" rather than sound like a monotonous announcer or the garble of an auctioneer, to put colors imaginatively juxtaposed on a canvas like Paul Klee rather than like someone painting a barn wall to protect the wood from deterioration.

### **Helping imagine**

Every human being has the prompt to be imagining things, I believe. Anybody who wants to be an artist for his or her vocation should have a fairly good gift to be imaginative or an over-riding will that determines that this is how you have to serve God. If you are not especially imaginative,

or you lack the patience to learn the underlying skills needed to draw the human figure, to act out an angry character, or to write a sentence that winks at your reader, it would be wiser for you to find a different profession in which to praise God and help your neighbor.

Artists, as I understand it, are called to help their neighbors who are handicapped in imagining; so, if you yourself are weak at imagining and performing imaginative actions, you are not much help. Find yourself in a different job, because society is set up in our generation with the deck often stacked against artists, who are often considered a luxury when you draw up the budget for the church or the school or the city buildings — unless you need some "conspicuous consumption" art by a superstar artist to boost your local prestige.

Being an amateur artist, I think, is great. "Amateur" means you do it for the love of it. And if you love doing it long enough, you become pretty good at photographing portraits of faces, composing impromptus on the piano, turning verses for someone's anniversary into occasional poems. Amateur artists don't have the pressure to earn a living with their artistry, to meet the critical jealous eye of competitive colleagues or the society-appointed (or self-appointed media) judges who set standards for photography, sonatas, and "little magazine" poetry. I recommend highly becoming an amateur artist. It almost always takes parents who are amateur artists to make it possible for children to become professional artists.

By professional artists I mean those imaginative people who take the lifetime necessary to hone their ability to be imaginative as story tellers, wood engravers, sculptors in clay, architects, song writers, musicians, cineastes, whatever art form it be. "Professional" means you give your guts and time with serious intensity to mastering your imaginative trade: gradually, over the years, you move from apprentice to journeyman or woman to consummate

craftsperson to master artist. When you can play with abandon in and with the medium of your specific art — gestures for mime, body rhythms for dance, watercolor and paper, nuanced words — a strong imagination can do wonderful things: Marcel Marceau's sadness, Martha Graham's choreographed sexuality, Andrew Wyeth's glistening watercolor raincoat, Baudelaire's urbane fleurs du mal, Brecht-Weill's lyrics and honkytonk melodies....

### Abnormal concentration

It is a temptation for professional artists to get swallowed up in their art. An Olympic athlete, like the prima donna dancer of any national ballet company, sacrifices a normal life to be the best professional artist there is. In our post-industrialized age of competitive differentiated specialization, that inordinate idolatry of expertise is not surprising. Graduate medical students doing residence at the emergency rooms of city hospitals are forced to spend incredible hours of sleep-deprived tension in order to become MDs. Academics tend to become bookworms: you get authoritative books written and published if you specialize in research backed-up by evidence and with years of detailed reflection that comes at the expense of other sides to your life — friendship, socializing, civic duties.

This concentration of lifetime on just one of your human activities is normal today, but that normality is humanly abnormal, I think, and maybe — should be — corrected or curtailed by a Christian conscience, so you don't dedicate yourself to becoming a "star" (?). At least one might say: the absorption of a person's whole life into becoming a professional artist (or career politician) who is "the creative/inspired best" is cancerous, and induces burnout. Along the way there can be periods of "artist's block" — you've stared at the canvas so long, you've studied the role to exhaustion, you can't get the plot to go somewhere, you're not a genius — so you become depressed....

A way to stay fresh and remain inventive as professional artist (or politician, teacher,

lawyer, but now especially as artist) is to take stock of your full-orbed humanity, and don't put all your eggs in the professional art basket. Be human! Keep your vocational job relative while giving it passionate, disciplined life time. I respect professional artists highly — theirs is a tough, scintillating ministry of performance. An amateur artist may come through on occasion with an exceptional artistic performance — everything just clicked. A professional artist comes through, on bad days, too, when things go wrong, when your heart's just not in it — the rent is overdue, you've got a touch of fever, the reviews were bad. A professional artist has the seasoned stamina and trained focus of concentration to do the job creditably anyhow, you don't depend on "creative inspiration."

The trouble comes for those who are trying to move from being amateur artists to becoming professional artists: how do you cope with the obstacles and breakdowns that normally occur (in step 4)?

### Some tips

Practical suggestions for young artists who would become Christian artisans:

1. Become as fully human as possible, developing all the sides of your aptitudes, temperament, character and personality; and stay aware of the riches of God's world and the human misery around us. Set aside sabbath rest after six days and nights of artistic work: act human — animals don't have a Sunday to celebrate the resurrection. After completing a speech, a concert tour, or publishing the book, enjoy a bit of restful activity. I'm not talking secular "take a break," "have a blast," or a vacant cruise vacation: I'm proposing sabbatical celebrative resting — like a convention retreat for Christian school art teachers in the Blue Mountains, or picking strawberries with a friend.

2. Develop a communal core of honest art — critical colleagues to sharpen up (tenderly) your skilled imagining profession. That is, don't be satisfied with getting together with artists in a cafe to cry in your beer about your troubles. Evangelical

Christians in North America don't cry in their beer together, but hold hands for fellowship and prayer meetings — that's a mistake. What's needed is forthright, edifying artistic critique of the concrete imaginative offerings you have brought into the circle of colleagues for that very testing.

3. If, as young artist, you are interested in having a future, get to know your past, the history of your artistic field, so you will have the comfort to know that your present problems as an artist in society are bigger than you and your impasses. These troubles have grown into their present shape over many generations, and there will be no easy solution — papal blessing, government money, IBM supporting nameless artists rather than investing in them, are utopian wistful thoughts. Historical knowledge can also keep you from an Elijah complex — "I, only I, LORD, am left to serve You..." (1 Kings 19).

4. Acknowledge Christ in your neighbor (Matthew 25) and give away your gift of artistry to her and him and any children. Christians have got to get rid of the toxic individualism endemic to the art world today. For an artist to ask, "How can I stay creative?" is like the fellow asking Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" — it is an utterly individualistic, self-centered approach. Jesus tried to convert that lawyer's query with a story into a good question: "*Who is my neighbor?*" (Luke 10:25-37). The right question for artists is: "What nuances do I see or hear or find in God's world which, as a deacon of imagination, I may make known to my neighbors?"

If you actively belong to an underground community like the body of Jesus Christ and you are convicted to obey God by leading them and your neighbors with your loving artistry to be imaginative humans, despite sin in God's world, I can assure you that you, like Moses once upon a time, will be beset and angry enough to stay freshly productive in your artistry for a lifetime, even if you do not get to see the Promised Land on Australian shores.



# The Beach

by Laura Apol

*Laura Apol was a junior at Dordt College in Sioux Center when she wrote this.*

Water to me is irrigation. Wildlife is rattlesnakes and coyotes. I live in Eastern Washington, where the hills are blanketed in sagebrush, and irrigation is vital to any sort of agricultural growth. I attend college in Iowa, where the Great Plains extend in miles of fields of corn and beans and occasional hog farms to sweeten the air. So when Spring Break allowed me to take some friends home to Washington, I wanted to show them something different; I arranged for us to stay at my Grandpa's house along the Straits of Juan de Fuca.

The first morning, we crossed the road and pushed our way through the tall weeds. The beach stretched about 50 yards to either side, the waves coming in at about half that distance. The smell of dead fish made me doubt my willingness to go farther. The beach looked dirty, littered with drift wood and seaweed. It was dreary with fog filling the air, the entire sky above a palette of mixed grays. My T-shirt and jeans didn't block the biting breeze that made my eyes water, but I was driven to explore because it was different.

The water matched the grayness of the sky. I could barely see the shore of Vancouver Island. Buoys bobbed with the small waves, marking the road for the barges. Waves washed over small, smooth rocks, creating clacking noises as these rocks shuffled over the larger rocks half-buried in the sand. Each wave caused a disturbance in the tide pools trapped between the rocks. Each wave pushed the driftwood a little further up the beach. The wood was smooth, as if sanded with sandpaper, the branches worn down to nubs. Seaweed washed over the rocks, then settled over them like a tablecloth.

Kelp was strewn all over the beach like

giant worms, their hollow insides filled with whatever it had collected from the water. When I stepped on one, it squelched black muck onto the sand. The sight of it turned my stomach, so I walked away.

I turned over a rock sitting partially in the water. Suddenly the water rippled and the sand stirred, telling me there was something alive in there. With a stick, I prodded into the corners of the rocks, trying to get it out, but when it came, it was actually little more than a shell with spindly legs. One of the guys I was with told me it was a hermit crab. He grabbed its shell and turned him upside down, showing me the little crab stuffed inside. I screamed, and it retreated like a turtle might have, pulling its head and legs inside.

Moving on to another tide pool, I found another interesting beach thing. Attached to the rock was a greenish-black, bumpy, jelly-like base. Extending a few inches out from this base were thin, cloudy-white tentacles with bright pink suckers. They swayed with the current, as if these tentacles were feeling the water for something to grab. Slowly, I lowered my finger past the surface of the water toward the tentacles. Upon contact, the tentacle sucked on my finger. I jerked my hand out of the water, then stared at the tentacles still waving, unaffected by my touch. My finger didn't hurt, but was almost tingly. Once again I stuck my finger into the water and brushed my finger across hundreds of tentacles. They sucked and let go when I pulled my finger away. I began to wonder what this creature did after the tentacles caught something edible, so I spotted a shell stuck to a rock and pulled it off. I looked inside, and the shiny, black thing living inside hid deeper. I dropped the shell into the water and watched it fall into the tentacles. In a few seconds, the tentacles closed around the shell, and everything was pulled inside, as if swallowed by the base.

Oddly enough, this ugly beach was keeping me entertained. I looked and looked for more critters, saw nothing new, and was about to give up when I spotted a starfish, almost hidden from view on the underside of a rock. My previous bravery with the tentacles increased my boldness, so putting my fingers near the base of the arms, I pulled on its body. It didn't budge. Nor did it budge when I tried again with all my strength. I called Ben over to help me, and together we pried the starfish off the rock with a stick, then I lifted it out of the water. I expected its arms to flop, but they were stiff, in the same position as when we pried it from the rock. I turned it over to see thousands of tiny tentacles lined around each arm like a fingerprint. A few stretched out further than the others, reaching for something to hold on to. I expected its body to be soft, but it was as hard as the rock I pried it from — and just as bumpy. Thinking I could get it to conform to my hand, as it had to the rock, I put it on the back of my hand and watched. It moved at a terribly slow pace, and I didn't have the patience to just stand there forever, so I picked it up off my hand and once again, I screamed. Those tiny tentacles had attached to the hairs on my hand!

I put it back into the water and just stood, looking over the beach. I wasn't awestruck by beautiful white sand as in Hawaii. I wasn't amazed at how long the beach extended; it was only about 100 yards. There were no crashing waves against monstrous rocks at which I could marvel. The kelp all over the beach was by no means pretty. But yet, this was an amazing place in God's creation. Just as I call Washington, a small speck on the globe, my home, these many animals called this nameless beach theirs. Just as I look down on these small creatures, God looks down on me. I am as fearfully and wonderfully made as every other critter on the beach.



## A learning disability called Asperger Syndrome

*Tena Siebenga-Valstar is a former teacher and principal, who, a few months ago, successfully defended her Ph.D. thesis at the University of Alberta. (In her thesis she explored how the vision of an independent Christian school influenced the practice of two teachers in the school, and she determined the relationship between the teacher's personal vision and that of the school.) We encourage all readers to submit a question for this column, even if they think they know the answer. Please send your question(s) to Dr. Siebenga-Valstar, 168 Windsor Dr., Fort McMurray, Alta., T9H 4R2, or e-mail her at tvalstar@telus.net.*

### Watch those labels!

#### Question # 1

Recently I have been hearing about a learning disability called Asperger Syndrome. What can you tell me about it?

#### Response:

Asperger Syndrome, as defined by Klin and Volkmar (1995), is a severe developmental disorder characterized by major difficulties in social interaction and restricted by unusual patterns of interest and behavior. There are similarities between Asperger Syndrome and autism without the latter's mental retardation. As with all labels, we must understand that a label does not summarize the whole person. There is a need to consider the individual's strengths and weaknesses and to provide the individualized intervention to meet the individual's needs.

Some description of the early development of individuals with Asperger Syndrome includes a precociousness in learning to talk, a fascination with letters and numbers (even decoding words with little or no understanding), the establishment of attachment to family members but inappropriate approaches to peers and other persons (e.g. initiating contact with other children by hugging them or screaming at them and then being puzzled by their responses).

Individuals with Asperger Syndrome (AS) are often socially isolated, but they are aware of the presence of others. Although they may describe themselves as loners, they desire to make friends and meet people. Their approaches, however, may be inappropriate or peculiar. They may engage another person in a one-sided conversation in which they can go on and on about their favorite subject which may be an unusual or a narrowly focused topic. They may be unaware whether the other person is interested, engaged in the conversation, attempting to interject a comment, wanting to change the subject of conversation or wanting to leave. A person with AS does not discern the nonverbal com-

munication cues of the listener.

Regardless of an apparent disregard for the other person's emotional expression, a person with AS may be able to describe correctly in cognitive and often formalistic fashion other people's emotions, expected intentions and social conventions, but is not able to spontaneously act upon that knowledge. There may be a history of delayed acquisition of motor skills such as pedaling a bike, catching a ball, opening jars or climbing "monkey bars." Persons with AS are often visibly awkward, exhibiting rigid gait patterns, odd posture, poor manipulative skills and significant deficits in visual-motor coordination.

Because this developmental syndrome can seriously impair the person's capacity to socialize, a team approach assessment is beneficial. The result can be suggestions of strategies to compensate for some of the challenges or acquisition of basic skills in social interaction. Training is usually necessary for recognizing situations as troublesome and for selecting the best strategy to use in the situation.

\* Klin, A. & Volkmar, F. R. 1995. *Asperger's Syndrome; Guidelines for Assessment and Diagnosis*. New Haven, CT: Learning Disabilities Association.

### Parents as tutors

#### Question # 2

Since we do not have a resource teacher at our school, we would like to ask parents to tutor some of the children. How can we most effectively make use of their time?

#### Response:

Parents, grandparents and volunteers have been helping in schools for many years. Often they help children in the younger grades with reading. I am sure there are many programs that have worked. Recently I read about one that was called "Tutoring Programs for Struggling Readers." Prior to being involved in the tutoring program, students should be pre-tested to determine their reading level. This can be done using graded word recognition lists, a set of graded reading passages and a spelling inventory.

The weekly time suggested is two sessions of 45 minutes each. Begin with 18 minutes of guided reading at the child's instructional level. Morrow and Woo (2001) suggest that a good beginning reader will "echo-read" simple pattern books, while a mid-first-grade reader will "partner-read" or alternately read pages of a basal reader or trade book. A late first-grade reader will read independently, requiring only incidental support.

The next 10-minute portion of the tutoring session involves





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word study. By using word categorization activities or games the student will be helped to internalize basic spelling patterns. During the next time frame of 10 minutes, the student does some easy reading in trade books. The child can re-read a favorite book or partner-read a new but easy book. The purpose of the easy reading is to increase children's fluency and strengthen their confidence as readers.

The last portion of the tutoring session involves seven minutes of reading to the child. The tutor reads a high quality selection to the child. It has been found that training tutors as they are involved in tutoring is more effective than pre-servicing tutors.

\* Morrow, L. M. & Woo, D. G. 2001. *Programs for Struggling Readers*. New York: Guildford.

## Survival by God's grace

### Question # 3

How does a little school, like Fort McMurray's in Alberta survive? This was a question I was asked by a number of teachers at the Prairie Association of Christian Schools Christian Educators' Convention.

### Response:

The simple answer is by God's grace. In its 10th year, Fort McMurray Christian has 34 students in Kindergarten to grade 8. Fort McMurray is a community where Christian Education is not well known. Although the Christian Reformed church has a tradition of Christian education, that church is a small church. Other churches are becoming familiar with the concept of Christian Education because of promotional talks in various churches by parents, students and society members. A strong Christian School support base has not been established because of the transient nature of the city's population.

The cost of living is very high in Fort McMurray; therefore, those who move here find tuition, in addition to housing costs, almost prohibitive. God has blessed our school with a corporate sponsor as well as some generous individual donors who underwrite a bursary program. This enables parents who sincerely desire Christian education for their children to access it even though they are unable to pay the tuition at this point in time.

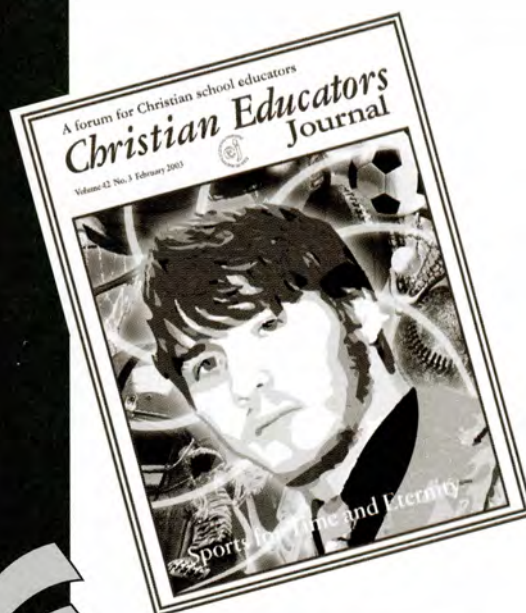
Staffing can be a challenge. Teaching a multi-grade classroom presents its challenges as does the cost of housing for anyone willing to answer God's call to teach here. Because this is an isolated center with a population of 45,000, we do not have an abundance of teachers who have a background in Christian education. Each year the school's budget is a challenge. We trust that God is faithful and know that we are to do our part to work

together to raise funds. Fund raising contributes about one third of the school's revenue.

The school has been in five different locations in its ten-year history. Facilities to house a school are impossible to acquire. We must move out of our present rented space in June, 2003. Should we receive some requested funds from Christians outside our community, plans are to develop the lower floor of the Christian Reformed church building which could accommodate a school of at least 100 students. Without help from the larger Christian community, Fort McMurray Christian may have to close.

Because committed school society members believe we must be obedient to God's call to offer Christian education as a schooling option in a city which could become one of Alberta's larger centers (because of the oil sands), we continue in faith.

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# Book Review

David I. Smith and John Shortt, *The Bible and the Task of Teaching*. Nottingham, England: Stapleford Centre, 2002. (Available only at Calvin College Bookstore) 171 pages plus extensive bibliography and index. \$14.00.

Reviewed by Steve J. Van Der Weele, Calvin College (Retired)

What do we teachers say to a Paul Hirst, an educator who in his essay "Christian Education: A Contradiction in Terms," (1971) and other writings claims that it is sheer nonsense to ask the Bible to guide us in our present-day educational institutions. He concludes that the curriculum of a Christian school will differ very little from a well-designed secular one.

Smith and Shortt have ascertained that many teachers in Christian schools are hard-pressed to respond to Hirst's case. Many unanswered questions greet us when we try to draw connections between the Bible and the pedagogy of our schools. The Bible, after all, has as its primary purpose displaying the narrative of redemption. It is not an encyclopedia for all knowledge; it is not a textbook of mathematics (though some in their zeal base arithmetic problems on biblical materials), or of history, except insofar as narrative reveals the pattern of salvation — or of science. And what does the Bible say about pedagogy, curriculum? Yet we claim our schools are biblically based.

The co-authors of this book challenge Hirst's thesis that the Bible cannot shape the content or pedagogy of our schools, that we should limit the Bible to devotional and pious purposes. The use of the Bible to achieve personal holiness is, of course, a good place to start. Moreover, the Bible can and should be taught as a subject in itself — in both secular and Christian schools — as a repository of our cultural heritage and, for believers, as a narrative of God's dealings with his people.

The authors present five approaches, each one occupying several chapters, as possible contenders for the key to a biblically-based education: (1) the role of the Bible as shaping the educator's personal qualities; (2) the biblical art of discerning world views and control beliefs; (3) the role of narrative as a link between the Bible and classroom pedagogy; (4) the significance of metaphor in the Bible; (5) educational models implied in both the content and shape of the Bible. No single approach is assigned a preference. Rather, the authors employ the metaphor of a rope, with the several strands representing an intertwining fusion of these approaches.

The character and virtues of the teacher are a good place to begin. After all, education is a moral venture, and the teacher must embody the virtues she recommends to her students. But that is easier said than done, for not all cultures appraise virtues alike. Humility, we say, is a requisite quality for a teacher. But not all cultures agree that humility is a virtue. And some virtues are not unique to the Christian faith. Nevertheless, in direct and

indirect ways the teacher can powerfully affect the character development of her students.

When we encounter the subject of "control beliefs" we encounter difficulties as well. What the Bible teaches about the nature of man and his relationships and the wisdom he needs to live well constitute important beliefs, but these beliefs exist at different levels, and many competing world views vie for the student's allegiance. Even world views need a definition, and the Bible does not specify exactly how these beliefs are to operate in the classroom. Much refining of these ideas needs to be done.

The authors become impassioned about the role of stories in education. Stories provide children with the feel of the world in which they will live. Stories abound — in both the Bible and in our cultural heritage. But stories are not innocent, and some can leave the wrong impression. The Bible is indispensable in disclosing the Big Story — the authentic patterns of reality, which until recently shaped all Western narrative.

Metaphor, a close companion to narrative, is coming into its own nowadays. We no longer distrust metaphor, insisting that it be reduced to prose before it can be useful. Like stories, metaphors lodge in the imagination and can shape the mind in powerful ways. The astute teacher, as appropriate, will confront the student with such questions as to whether the world is a garden or a machine, a paradise or a desert, a playground or a plantation to be carefully nurtured and preserved. The image of a shepherd in isolation would prove repugnant in certain cultures. It needs to be seen as part of the rich network of pastoral references.

The enormous cultural gap does not disenfranchise the greatest model of all time — the One whom the common people heard so gladly. What he did above all was teach people the proper way of seeing, provide them with an orientation that went beyond legalism and offer life and hope and meaning to their impoverished souls. But other models need to be acknowledged — the Torah, for example, in tension with the prophets. And the wisdom literature of the Bible further illuminates human experience and prompts us to seek the wisdom that converts that experience into destiny.

This summary does not do justice to the over-all significance of this book or its importance for teachers. The style is lively, the discourse is bolstered by a representative array of writers about education, the illustrations have zest, the rhetorical flow is meticulous and compelling. And it gives authentic answers to the questions of how we can use the Bible in the classroom.

## *What does the Bible have to say about about pedagogy, curriculum?*



## Recent Titles Reviewed by Steve Van Der Weele



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**Ben Witherington III and Christopher Mead Armitage, *The Poetry of Piety: An Annotated Anthology of Christian Poetry*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002. 175 pages. \$16.99.**

These two editors, a seminary professor and a professor of English, have put together an anthology of poems by 28 poets from the late sixteenth century to the late twentieth century. And they have furnished guides to the poems which W. H. Auden might call "The preacher's loose, immodest tone," but which they expect will enable the poem to function very directly as an aid to the spiritual life — the piety — of the student. They provide the text of the poem, a brief biography of the author (among them John Donne, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, T. S. Eliot — but also Thomas Hardy and Ted Hughes), and a helpful annotation of the poem, a careful "walkthrough" — explications which will save both student and teacher much time. But when the editors have done this, they have not yet done all they intend. For now comes "The Piety" — attempts to explore the larger import of the biblical ambience of the poem. Included here is a set of very personal questions for the student to confront. Sidney thought "Poetry must be gently led." These editors are more muscular in their strategy. They wish to insure that the analyses do not remain an academic exercise. It will take some tact for a teacher to elicit from the students answers to such questions as "What more can you give to God that you have not already offered up to him? Pray for God's help to do this." Again, "Is your spiritual life currently in a dry period, or are you experiencing the 'banks and breaks' of spring?" But it may all just work. And then the editors may be tempted to do another volume. This time they may just wish to eliminate the popular hymns, which hardly need explication, and include — by all means — at least a sonnet by Milton, as well as selections from Edmund Spenser, Sir Philip Sidney, and Shakespeare — sonnets 129 and 146 beg for inclusion. And there are more modern poems as well that will fit nicely into the project: the later Wordsworth, Coleridge, X. J. Kennedy (e.g., "The Waterbury Cross"), and Denise Levertov among them.

**Dale Cooper and Kevin Vande Streek, *Lasting Victory: Meditations for Students, Athletes, Coaches, and Those who Cheer Them on*. Grand Rapids: Calvin College Alumni Association, 2002. 105 pages, \$8.00.**

Chaplain Dale Cooper and basketball coach Kevin Vande Streek have teamed up to produce a series of fifty meditations appropriate for the culture of athletics. Both teachers at Calvin College, they sensed that improvising thoughts for participants just before

a game, or trying to teach fans during an athletic contest what is appropriate conduct, was not quite good enough. What was needed was some structure, some readily available collection of thoughts which would place athletics in the context of the Christian life — its challenges, its hazards, its frustrations, its opportunities for growth, its joys.

Some titles: What do we owe our Opponents? Nothing but the Game? Teamwork. Two series account for a number of the meditations: Blueprints for Success, and Character Qualities. The book fills an important niche.

**Thomas F. Heinze, *How Life Began: Answers to my Evolutionist Friends*. Ontario, Canada: Chick Publications, P.O. Box 3500, 91761-1100. 2002, 160 pages, \$8.50. E-mail: postmaster@chick.com**

Anyone who follows the debate about origins — together with the evolutionary hypothesis — senses that the materialistic humanists control the agenda and the discourse of the debate. Moreover, they exert their muscle at every opportunity to compel schools to teach evolution as fact, and creation, if referred to at all, as something quaint religionists believe in. Thomas Heinz, an evangelical missionary who served in Italy for thirty years, has had to write and update books that he needed for his work (Baker published his *The Creation vs. Evolution Handbook* in 1971). This convenient handbook — nurtured by internet correspondents on both sides of the debate — is the author's updated effort to demonstrate the bankruptcy of evolutionists' claims and to set forth the soundness of the claims for intelligent design. He harries the evolutionists in their efforts to establish a scientific basis for their claims. His responses, based on the evidence of respected scientists, are economically presented and reveal a passion for establishing a doctrine of creation and the anthropology which that doctrine implies.

**Barbara Hilliard, *Good News: Thematic Bulletin Boards for Christian Classrooms*. 4720 Boston Way, Lanham, Maryland, 20706, Scarecrow Press. 2002, 225 pages. \$29.95.**

Good News contains 110 religious bulletin board ideas with instructions and illustrations. This workbook abounds with good ideas for children from kindergarten through fifth grade. It facilitates the use of the Bible in the elementary classroom. The instructions follow this sequence: Basic Instructions, Special Effects, Slogans, Classroom Activities — followed by Suggested Reading. The pages include numerous designs, figures, images for easy copying and use on the blackboard.

James M. Penning & Corwin E. Smidt: *Evangelicalism, the Next Generation: Does Conservative Protestantism Have a Future?* Grand Rapids: Baker Book House (Baker Academic) in partnership with the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities. A Renewed/Minds Book. 2002, 174 pages plus 25 pages of appendices and index. \$21.99.

Twenty years ago James Davison Hunter published a rather pessimistic book, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation*, about the future of American evangelicalism. Extrapolating from his data, he concluded that the upcoming generation, yielding to the pressures of secularism, would be more tolerant and more liberal in religious beliefs, moral values, and political attitudes than the generation of the early 1980s. Smidt and Penning have done extensive research among nine Christian colleges and present a more optimistic picture about that generation. Religious expression is robust and vital among many students, and the future looks more promising than it did twenty years ago.

Douglas Wilson, *The Case for Classical Christian Education*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2002. 248 pages, \$15.99.

If anyone doubts the dismal condition of public education, this book should suffice to make the case. The crisis is not so much that teachers lack techniques and strategies for teaching. The crisis is a spiritual one. We are experiencing a radical breakdown of civil order among our children, the parents are abdicating responsibility for overseeing their child's work, far too many students are classified as ADHD, and television absorbs children's time like a blotter. The recommendations hark back to an earlier time, when a Christian anthropology was in place and when the timeless truths of reality were imparted to the children at ages appropriate to their maturity. Logos School, and St. Andrews College, have been successful beyond expectations.

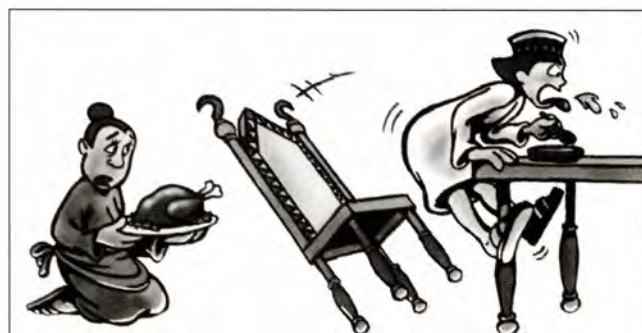
Vicki Caruana, *Educating Your Gifted Child*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2002. 200 pages, \$12.99.

If one wishes a non-stressful atmosphere while his children are being educated, he ought not to wish for a gifted child. Such children often come with traits which offer a challenge to teacher and parents. Such a child may wish to concentrate on his leading ability and consider all other subjects irrelevant. And parents are tempted to live vicariously through the area of the child's talent. Social problems develop, and the teacher or parent needs to keep the student challenged to keep at bay the spectre of boredom. Dependent on anecdotes, and with reliance on experts in the field, the book offers practical suggestions to motivate the student and provide a vision of what it means to be human.

Jerry Yu Ching and Mike Onghai, *The Greatest King*. Woodland Hills, California: Web Cartoons LLC Publishing. 2002, 48 pages, \$13.99. Reviewed by Bert Witvoet.

Our oldest grandchild is not yet old enough to read, but once he does, I hope to give him the Christian answer to *Harry Potter*, namely, *The Greatest King*. I'm talking genres, not level of reading and amount of reading. *The Greatest King* is a fantasy book that connects an imaginary world to the historical Christ. It's mainly a picture book with short bits of text that make it suitable for readers 6 to 9 years old.

If it's true that children today crave stories about super heroes and imaginary kingdoms with characters larger than life, then this little gem should catch their attention. Listen to this description of the book: "a gargantuan troll-like character with incredible strength, an elfin character with a wizard's touch, an outlandish 'entertainer' for pudgy comic-relief and a young hero in



search of something altogether world-changing and spiritually uplifting."

The drawings, which portray multi-racial characters, are exceptionally good — very strong and quite funny. And the writing is economical and to the point. What's more, this comic book gets to the heart of the gospel as it follows a pesky and arrogant little prince in his search for the greatest king.

The prince enters into the presence of god-like creatures, who easily represent idols of our time, except that each one of them acknowledges that there is someone greater than they. That someone is Jesus, whose greatness lies in his willingness to suffer and die for others. By coming finally to the cross on Calvary, the spoiled-brat prince submits and learns the most valuable lesson a future ruler can learn — the secret of humility and real power.

Author and illustrator Jerry Yu Ching and fellow author Mike Onghai are on to something. Although new authors, they're hardly beginners. Ching is a Los Angeles-based animator and a veteran of Sesame Street spinoff *Batitot* in the Philippines. Onghai is a magazine co-publisher in New York. Recommended for Christian school libraries and for book shelves at home.