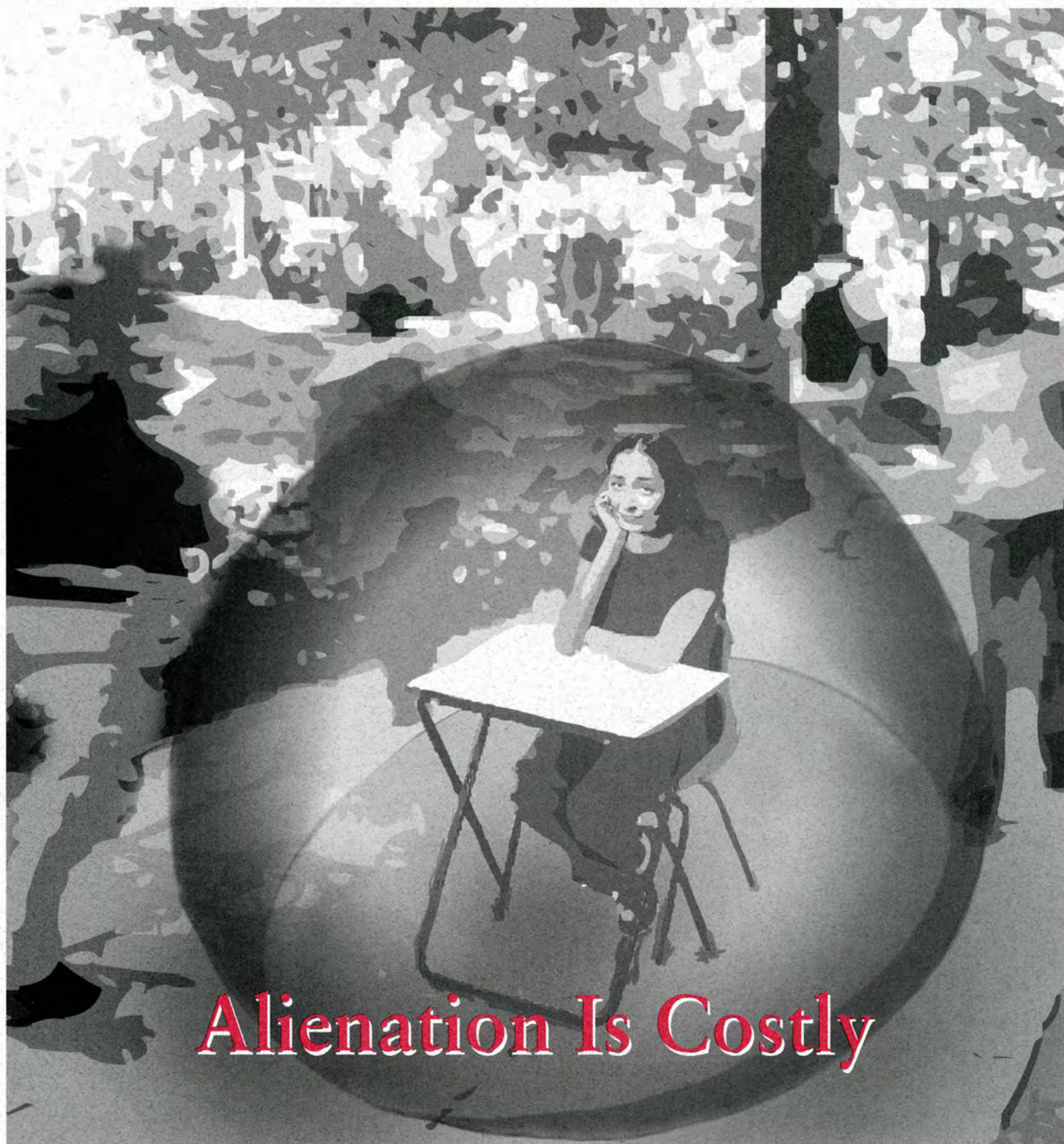


A forum for Christian school educators

# *Christian Educators* Journal

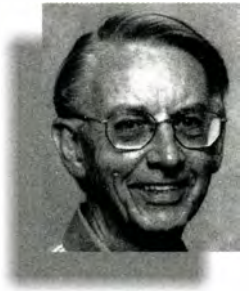
Volume 43 No. 1 October 2003



**Alienation Is Costly**



## No Strangers in the School, Please!



Alienation in the school setting has to be seen in the larger context of alienation from God, from creation and from our fellow human beings. As such, alienation is as old as sin. One can define alienation as “the state of being an outsider” (The Collins English dictionary) or take it back to its Latin root, *alienus*, which means being a stranger or foreigner. In either case, alienation spells loneliness and exclusion. With the introduction of sin into the world, we immediately witness the breakdown of community, harmony and trust. And we all know that these are essential to human well-being. No sooner had Adam and Eve sinned then they were expelled from the place of harmony; they were ashamed of their nakedness, another form of alienation, and some years later Cain murdered his brother Abel. Murder is, of course, the extreme form of alienation.

So we might well argue that just as the poor will always be with us, so will the lonely and excluded always be with us. Even the Christian school cannot stop alienation. Kids are cruel and they fight for acceptance, often at the expense of others. Teachers cannot be everywhere. Realism demands that we must expect a certain amount of behavior that will alienate certain students.

### Alienation is costly

Yes, but we need not be quite that fatalistic about the estrangement practices that emanate from both teachers and students. Especially the Christian school should stress community building and inclusivity. The cost of alienation is simply too great, first of all to the students, but also to the school. How many parents have decided against sending their children to the Christian school because they had a terrible experience themselves in earlier years. Every school has to own up to a substantial casualty list — former students whose spirits were mowed down by the “friendly fire” of school policy, teacher ignorance and student selfishness.

This past summer, my wife talked to a young woman who had attended the same Christian school from grade one through grade 12. “Did you like the experience?” my wife asked. “I hated every moment of it,” came the answer. Pain was written all over the young woman’s face. It seemed obvious that my wife was staring at a victim of alienation. I reflected on that brief conversation and wondered what Christian schools can do to avoid such damage and such strong rejection years later.

### It’s a pedagogical problem

The problem in some Christian schools, I believe, is not a moral or a theological one, but a pedagogical one. Sometimes we do not understand the needs of a child who must grow up into a mature, self-assured, responsible and caring human being.

Key words for this process are “freedom” and “internal discipline” rather than suppression of feelings and a heavy emphasis on rules and external restrictions. Teachers need to be models more than prescribers. Their classrooms need to be places where students feel safe, respected and cared for.

An article in *Reason* magazine, written by Nick Gillespie, analyzes what went wrong in the Columbine High School, where two students went on a killing rampage: “The Columbine shootings ... seem to implicate not only the killers’ own sick, twisted minds, but a school culture which humiliated and tormented them in ways that are all too familiar to Americans.” *Time* reported that the two were “routinely physically threatened and taunted as ‘dirt bags’ and ‘inbreds.’” Gillespie concludes that politicians and public figures blame the usual — violence in entertainment, the breakdown of families — but they do not “address a pervasive school culture that is generally acknowledged as nasty and brutish.”

### Surrounding culture alienates

Of course, alienation in the schools is a complex issue. Not all public schools suffer from the same kind of brutish behavior as described by a student at Columbine, and Christian schools have a much greater opportunity to establish community, which is the perfect antidote to alienation. But we must keep our eyes open and learn from what is happening in some schools and probably is happening to a lesser extent in our schools.

Part of the problem, also for our schools, is that we live in a culture that alienates all of us. The depersonalization of the workplace, the mass production of goods, and the shopping we do in stores that look more like warehouses all contribute to a loss of individual freedom and responsibility. The Internet provides us with a virtual reality. The secularization of all areas of life has moved God into the background, and without God, we have lost the center of meaning and purpose in life, not to mention the only Being who can bring harmony, trust and a sense of belonging. Urbanization alienates us from nature. How can Christian schools row against the powerful stream of isolation and estrangement?

### Row against the flow

Ironically, they can do so only by entering into another kind of alienation or estrangement.

The hymn writer knew what he was talking about when he wrote: “I am a stranger here, within a foreign land. My home is far away upon a golden strand.” We can quibble with him about our home being in some ethereal place called heaven (See *Heaven Is Not My Home* by Paul Marshall), but he is right in saying that

we are strangers in the surrounding culture. And for that reason, if we want to oppose the trends of alienation, we have to do things in our schools that are counter-cultural, that estrange us from the educational establishment.

We could start by saying and believing that the teacher must love his students more than his subject, his pay check or his reputation. We could go on to say and believe that the content of the curriculum is not as important as the well-being of the souls gathered in each classroom. We could find ways of empowering each student. After all, alienation is a loss of empowerment. (I found a neat little quotation by an Eric Hoffer, that says: "There is no alienation that a little power will not cure.") We could pull ourselves out of a teacher-oriented classroom into a child-oriented one, which is different from saying education ought to be child-centered (we prefer the mantra of a God-centered, child-oriented and teacher-directed education).

### Policies can reconcile

Dordt professor John Van Dyk, in an editorial in this magazine of February 1991, wrote "While there may be many complicated, even mysterious, reasons for a student to be at risk, often the most fundamental factor is overlooked: a profound sense of alienation, inadequacy and rejection." Right on, O learned one! Jesus' mission is all about reconciliation, and he wants us to join him in that mission: "I was a stranger and you invited me in." Our Christian schools should major in reconciliation, and our school policies and classroom management should promote empowerment and inclusion.

And, so, John Van Dyke calls for "a collaborative classroom with a warm, accepting, and positive atmosphere." He contends that "cooperative learning strategies ... when implemented in a

classroom in which the development of trust, shared responsibility, and mutual concern and encouragement are high on the agenda, have been remarkably effective in aiding even those who would otherwise be shunted off as learning disabled or would end up as failures." These classrooms would celebrate gifts rather than assess achievements. He also points to the need for staff to be open with each other and freely discuss strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures.

So much can and should be said about the problem of alienation in the schools. Space limitations and personal ignorance prevent me from offering much more in terms of concrete advice. But what I would like to do in this editorial is make an impassioned plea for a change of priorities and focus in those schools and by those teachers who have up till now been blind to the pain of estrangement taking place in what is supposed to be a community of learners. Rather than practice zero tolerance against students who misbehave, let's have zero tolerance against the spirit of alienation. We all need the Holy Spirit to empower us, but the Holy Spirit works through our spirits as we empower each other. The Holy Spirit will give us the courage to break through the legion of expectations coming to us from a society that produces far too many losers as it worships the winners. "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ (Col. 2:8)."

If you and your colleagues believe in Christ, and you together pray, the Holy Spirit will come down and set your classrooms free!

Bert Witvoet

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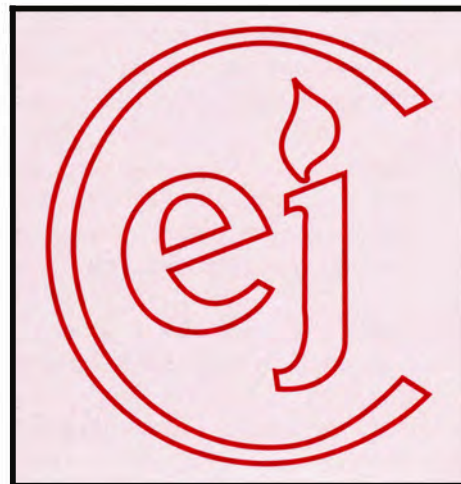
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# The Class Loner

by Frank De Vries

*Frank DeVries is a retired principal who is known for writing hymns and children songs ("Tiny Little Spider"). He lives in Nanaimo, British Columbia, with his wife, Celia. The two have recently celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary..*

Broad bands of sunlight, thick with dust, drifted through the carelessly whitewashed windows. Under the low ceiling Peter and I slowly shuffled through the massed chickens as they parted before us like the Red Sea waters. Their contented clucking was strangely comforting, and even the light ammonia smell of their droppings did not interfere with the overall feeling of peace and contentment. Still the reality of farm life suddenly presented itself as Peter said, "Well, here we go again. Look at that!" Peter was the owner of the chicken breeding farm, and treasurer of our school board. Upon my request he had invited me over to have a look at his chicken business.

In front of us, several chickens hurriedly scampered away from a small chicken. Lying on the dirt floor, it struggled to get up at our approach, but as one of her legs wouldn't support her, she couldn't. With several small clumps of feathers sticking out at an abnormal angle she looked a pathetic sight. Peter picked her up. "They always do that," he explained. "There al-

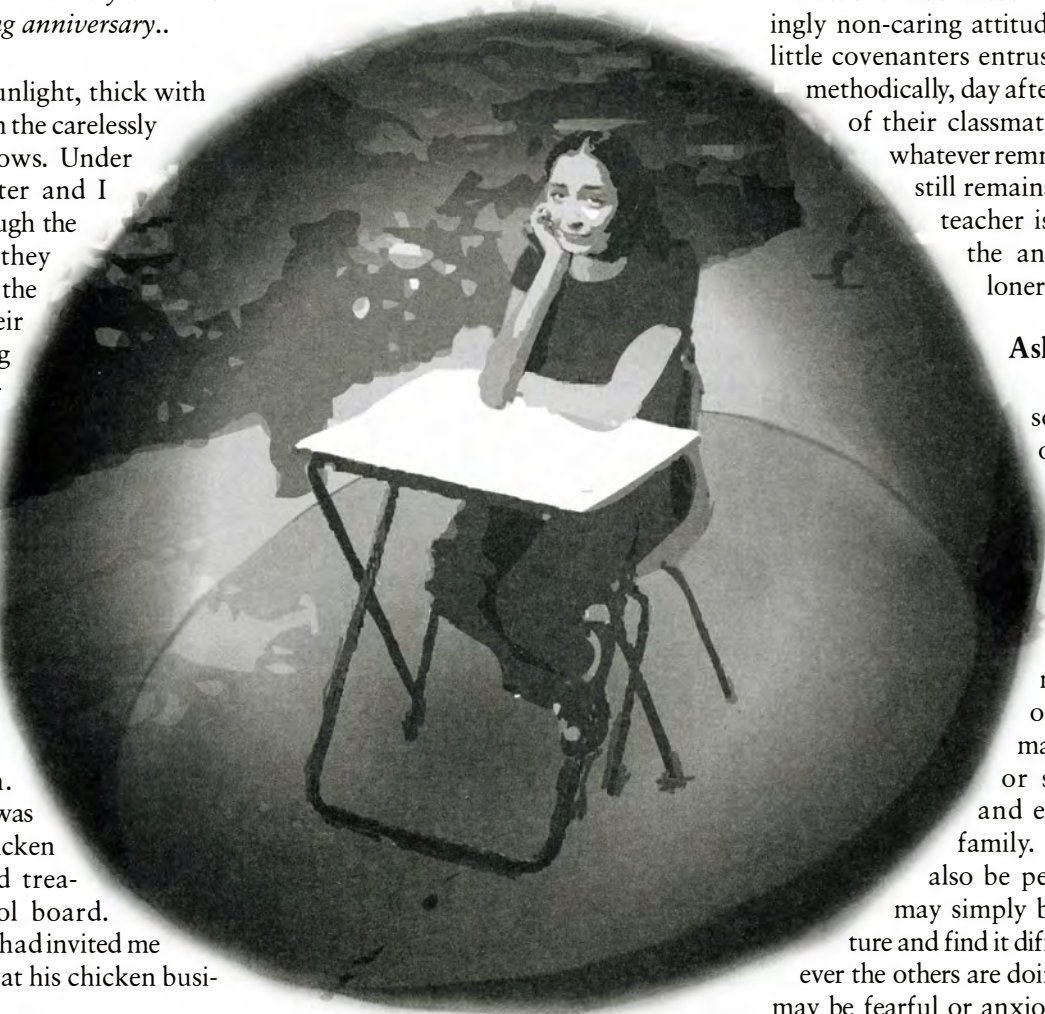
ways seems to be one chick they tend to single out, and in groups they peck at it until bare spots begin to show. That, in turn, spells the beginning of the end for the poor beast. They keep pecking at it

anywhere who has not observed the defeated shoulder slump, or the hurt in the eyes of the child who was not chosen for one game or another, who was laughed at in a dismissive manner, or even maligned. No teacher has missed the casual, seemingly non-caring attitude of some of the little covenants entrusted to us as they methodically, day after day, pick on one of their classmates and dismantle whatever remnant of confidence still remains in the child. No teacher is unfamiliar with the anguish of a class loner.

## Asking why

The reasons why some children are ostracized by their peers are as many as there are children in the room. The reasons may be societal: parents may have divorced or separated, there may be alcoholism or serious sickness and even death in the family. The reason may also be personal: the child may simply be reticent by nature and find it difficult to join whatever the others are doing. The youngster may be fearful or anxious, or may be regarded as different because of some specific handicap or a perceived unattractiveness. Or the harassment may simply have been a left-over transferred from an earlier classroom.

As for me, I don't think I have ever had a class without such a child. I also know that many times my heart was broken when I witnessed the unaccepted child break



mercilessly. I don't know what I can do about it."

Over the years that chicken coop picture has often come to mind. Although dissimilar in its graphic hurtfulness, the essence of the scene has repeated itself many times in my classrooms. And I'm sure that I'm not the only one who has experienced this. I'm convinced there is not a teacher

down in tears because of the thoughtless actions of his or her classmates. I often tried to find ways to help, but equally often I found myself powerless against what, on the surface, seemed an innocent teasing but, in essence, was a thinly disguised mob-style attack on a classmate.

It is not that such attacks were physical. Usually they weren't. Most often they were in the form of a putdown or even abusive language. But there are many much less obvious ways in which to diminish a classmate. Dr. John VanDyk, in his wonderful book *The Craft of Christian Teaching*, recalls the case of a six-year old boy who taught his teacher that to hold your thumb and index finger in the shape of an "L" is to label someone as a "Loser." And well I remember from the past the many sneaky ways in which my friends and I would ostracize or bug someone we didn't like.

#### A few suggestions

As I am writing, a legion of reasons come to the fore. Since I'm not a psychologist, it obviously lies outside my purview to deal with any of these root causes. However, it is important for you and me to try exploring ways of how to deal with such situations in our Christian classrooms, how to be a healing influence under difficult circumstances. I hope I can help a bit with some ideas and things I have tried and found to have been more or less successful.

As a teacher I sometimes asked other children in the class to work with the unwanted child in projects or tasks to be done. These efforts were not always successful. However, I did find the following helpful. After the children had left the classroom and I reflected on the work of the day, I always found it good to talk with the Lord about the child in question. Although this never resulted in a miracle "cure," doing this persistently gave me ideas as how to work with the child. Over time I learned that having the children keep a journal was especially helpful. Let me explain.

In our daily journal time, I allowed chil-

dren to write whatever they wished to write, and in whatever form they wished. I always assured them of absolute privacy. Nothing they would write, I solemnly promised, would ever be read by or revealed to anyone other than myself. Over the years I kept that promise. Further, I always answered any questions they posed or commented on what they had written. The results usually were that eventually (and sometimes it took a long time) a disliked child would open up about herself. It was then that positive and helpful written communication between the student and the teacher could take place.

Another helpful thing is to suggest to a student to say something nice to, or do something nice for, someone they really didn't like. Of course if the next day that kid brings you an apple, you have another problem on your hand!

I always used to keep the journals locked up in a class cupboard, and, at the end of the year, I would shred or otherwise destroy these journals in front of the entire group. By doing that an additional and important bonus accrued to me — I established a reputation as a trustworthy teacher. This was important because this information was conveyed to younger brothers and sisters who came to my class in subsequent years. And this, in turn, gave me "something to work with," a head start in relationships, if you will, at the beginning of another school year.

#### Play therapy

Another wonderful way of having children open up about themselves is having them engage in puppetry. Puppetry, by the way, is an awesome instrument for integrating disciplines across the curriculum.

I would divide the class into groups and have them construct a puppet theater. If the school doesn't have a ready-made one, a good and economical way to make one is using a refrigerator box. The next step is to make hand puppets. If you are at a loss how to do that, have an art teacher give

you some hints (I always took this route because I am as artistic as a two by four).

Following this, I had the children write plays. My friends, neither you nor the children will ever have more fun than when these are performed. But the exercise yields not only fun. Through the puppet your problem child will take on an entirely new personality, and there is a good chance you won't even recognize her or him. As a teacher you are bound to gain greater insights into the child's personality and problems.

It is important to note here that the experiences I am recounting took place during my years as an elementary teacher, some 389 years ago, in Christian schools in Canada. In those days, if we wished to confirm suspicions about who was lonely in class, we drew up a sociogram. This is similar to what is done these days when teachers give the students a class list and ask them to identify the three students they would like to join in play, and the three they wouldn't.

Although principles and methods of dealing with lonely children may still be basically the same, some of the specifics will vary when applied to secondary school students. It is also important to realize that not everything I tried worked out as well as I had wished. Some of the projects were failures. However, I would guess that about 85 per cent of the effort I put in was crowned with success.

No doubt, you realize that a large measure of responsibility for the hurts put upon a lonely child must lie on the shoulders of those who "do the picking." It should be helpful to know, then, that the methods for opening up an unwanted child work equally well on all the other children in class. You may gain helpful insights as to why they pick on certain children. It is not unusual to learn that those who do the "picking" have larger problems than the "pickee." In fact, some of the more popular kids in class also feel lonely!

Further ways of healing broken situations



are limited only by a teacher's imagination. Of course, teachers are very different from each other. And so it stands to reason that one teacher may be more successful than another and may perhaps be more sensitive to certain situations. And herein lies yet another possible problem: the teacher herself.

### Teacher dislikes


I think we may accept that every teacher in a Christian school loves the children entrusted to him or her. However, being human, they just do not like all children equally well. Although most Christian school teachers *love* the children they teach, for any number of reasons they *like* some children better than others. The most common bond is a psychic likeness. This, of course, is the same kind of likeness that

governs us all, children and adults alike. It is the reason why they, and you and I, have special friends. It is normal. But in the same way that our *likes* bind us to some adults or children, *dislikes*, too, come into play in human relationships. I cannot stress enough here the importance of *not* showing such dislikes to children in class. Kids are very, very smart, and read you very quickly. In an emotionally stressful altercation with a student, be sure to **FORCE YOUR EYES TO BE LOVING** (Matt. 6:22, 23).

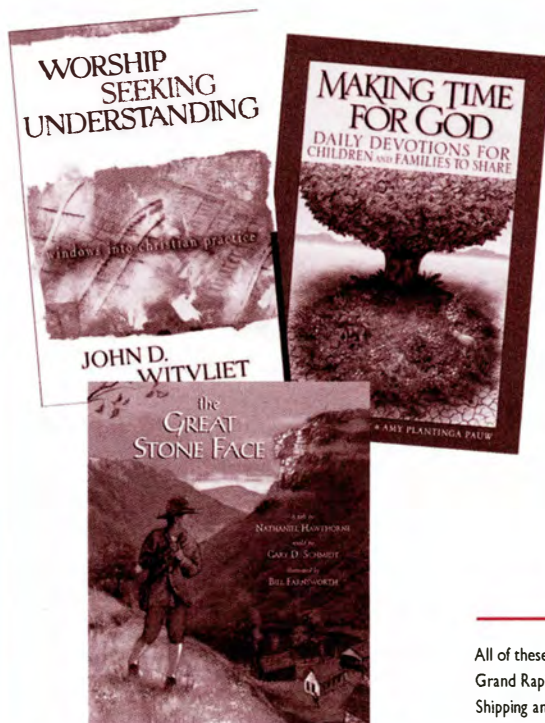
It is also crucial that, when we have a child in class we actively dislike, we find out what causes that dislike. To our great or sometimes not so great surprise we may learn that what we dislike in the child is an unpleasant character trait we ourselves have, and dearly wish we didn't have. Not

being nice or being unfriendly to a child will often give rise to feelings of guilt and attempts to "make up" by doing special favors and being extra, often artificially, friendly. But this does not work. In fact, the entire relationship becomes decidedly "uncool." To so treat a child the other children in class dislike will backfire!

Teaching in a Christian school is an enormous privilege. For teachers in such a school the craft of teaching can develop into a wonderful professional calling to the benefit of student and teacher alike and, dare I say it, most especially so for the unwanted child.

May our actions in our classrooms always reflect our deepest confessions. And may a potentially or actually lonely child never secretly have to ask of the teacher, "Why have you forsaken me?" 

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# Christian Kids At Risk

## in the Christian School Environment

by Susan D. Hill

*Susan Hill (sdhillfam@aol.com) is a personnel manager with a degree in interpersonal communication and psychology. She has been involved with youth and has served on various parent committees at the Christian school in Bozeman, Montana, where she lives with her husband and three children.*

In case you haven't noticed, a spiritual battle over adolescents is raging. This battle has been widely discussed in articles on everything from Columbine to teenage pregnancies, drug abuse to eating disorders, gang participation to suicide rates, and so on. Few people, however, seem to realize that Christian kids are at risk in all the same categories. Even fewer worry about kids who go to Christian schools and go home to Christian homes. After all, those kids are covered on all fronts, right? Wrong.

### Dead wrong.

Current information from Barna Research Online indicates that, although most teens have a relationship with Christianity, that relationship is usually a superficial one. The "latest study suggests that faith is a passing fancy of young people. Neither their *behavior* nor their *beliefs* supports the notion that they are deeply spiritual or truly committed to Christianity," even though 60 percent of teens say they are committed Christians" (*italics mine*).

Other sources, including studies by Gallup, Josh McDowell Ministries and the Nehemiah Institute, "reveal that the average 'Christian' student thinks and believes no differently than non-churched teens." For example, "85 percent of Christian teens are likely to reason just because it's wrong for you doesn't mean it's wrong for me, and 57 percent could not even say that an objective standard of truth exists." Sadly,

"55 percent of Christian students from Christian homes are denying their faith before they graduate from college." These statistics should cause us great alarm.

### Negative views

Some high school boys I know sounded the alarm for me one morning at breakfast several years ago. My husband and I enjoyed hosting them on Saturday mornings, engaging them in various discussions as their thoughts were often refreshing and unedited. One such morning we talked about Christian education. Since we were considering a Christian education for our daughters, we laid academic comparisons aside and focused on the spiritual pros and cons of public school, home-school, and Christian school. To my astonishment, all three resoundingly agreed that public school was the best environment; as an afterthought they gave home-school education an honorable mention.

Spiritually speaking, their view of Christian schools was decidedly negative. They confided that many of their friends who had gone exclusively to Christian schools became serious drug addicts in their teen years. One boy suggested Christian schools were in danger of producing some of the worst atheists!

They continued to explain that many kids in Christian schools regarded school as a restrictive playpen with a "can't do this, can't do that" mentality resulting from too many persnickety rules. A Christian pledge, used by one local school at the beginning of every day, had become a rote religious exercise meaningless to many kids. Numerous students were there only because their parents wanted them there. They were bored with Bible study and rolled their eyes at many of the chapel speakers who presented monotonous, worn-out themes (e.g. "I did drugs, alcohol and sex, and then I found Jesus" testimonies). The three boys

added that kids in Christian schools were over-taught to be good and, therefore, it was cool to be bad. Some were living a double life — shoplifting, using drugs and listening to bad music — while still showing up every morning for the Christian pledge. Tragically, these patterns are not unique.

### Wasteland

A young woman I know landed a teaching job at a Christian school in another town. She also became a youth leader in a local outreach ministry to public high school kids. As a youth leader, she led many teens into the joy of knowing Christ. But as a teacher in a Christian school, she found a spiritual wasteland. She called me one day to say how disillusioned she was in her work. Never had she met so many teens who, at a moment's notice, could recite a Scripture verse verbatim or produce an A+ report in church history, yet whose hearts seemed dead toward God. She described how vicious the clique system was in ostracizing anyone who appeared to be a "loser." Though she tried to steer kids away from religiosity into a personal relationship with God, she experienced perpetual resistance.

Of course, not all kids are negatively affected by a Christian school experience. Many students gain a moral, intellectual and spiritual foundation they would never receive from Sunday school alone. They are better able to live in a materialistic world without succumbing to its temptations; they are more discerning about the myriad of messages they hear in the world. They gain an expanded and balanced view of science and history. Because of these potential benefits, we decided to enroll our daughters in a Christian school, but we knew our involvement couldn't stop there.

The fact is, teachers and Christian schools are not responsible for the spiritual condi-



tion of our kids. That burden falls on our shoulders as parents. We impart daily to our children what we are or are not spiritually since they know us up close and personal. We must never expect a school to do our job. Having said that, however, what can be done in Christian schools to promote, not hinder spiritual development in students?

### Passionate teaching

Teachers have an enormous opportunity to be agents for the kingdom simply because of the sheer amount of time they spend with kids. Nevertheless, it all comes down to their personal relationship with Christ, because they, too, will impart what they are or are not spiritually.

For example, in *The Sacred Romance*, Brent Curtis and John Eldredge bluntly remark that, all too often, teaching biblical truth is “like an IRS 1040 form: It’s true, all the data is there, but it doesn’t take your breath away.” This sort of dry presentation can happen in Christian schools. The Bible teaching can be academically sound, but spiritually dull. It’s not *what* you teach, but the passion for God behind it that comes through the words — that’s what kids remember.

Administrators need to place a high value on a teacher’s passion for Christ when hiring. Unfortunately, academic qualifications, teaching experience, church membership and agreement with moral standards don’t reveal spiritual depth in a teacher; yet most

job applications are limited to these categories. But it is the administrators who can build healthy foundations for their schools by pursuing teachers with spiritual vitality and maturity.

In addition, assuming that all kids who come from Christian families or go to

stood already, to add a great deal of information which you didn’t want, and say nothing at all about the thing that was puzzling you. I have watched this from both sides of the net; for when, as a teacher myself, I have tried to answer questions brought me by pupils, I have sometimes,



Christian schools are, in fact, Christians, is a grave mistake. Most teenagers have not crossed the threshold of owning their faith despite growing up in a Christian environment. To teach kids under this assumption sometimes corners them spiritually to where they resent hearing about Christianity at all.

C.S. Lewis wrote in *Reflections On The Psalms*: “When a (student) took the problem to a (teacher) as we all remember, he was very likely to explain what you under-

after a minute, seen that expression settle down on their faces which assured me that they were suffering exactly the same frustration which I had suffered from my own teachers.”

### Free to challenge

What if teachers approached their students as if they had not yet decided about the Christian faith, presenting the truths of Christianity in a manner that opened a forum for discussion? Both home and school



need to be a safe environment for kids to air their questions, struggles and doubts. Christianity can stand up to the test. Spiritual wrestling is a normal part of adolescence. After all, this process is precisely what leads us to a stronger faith.

Albert Schweitzer addresses this in his book *Memoirs of Childhood and Youth*: "The teenage years are sometimes a process of unpleasant fermentation working itself off and leaving the wine clear. My religious instruction came through Pastor W. Although I respected him, I kept myself closed up. The good man never suspected what was stirring in my heart. His instruction was in itself excellent, but it gave no answer to a great deal of what my inner self was concerned with. How many questions I would have gladly asked him, but that was not allowed us. He believed that in submission to faith, all reasoning must be silenced."

Because of this experience, Schweitzer believed that much goes on in the heart of a youth that most adults don't realize. As a result, parents and teachers should do all they can to encourage children to express and discuss their inner struggles and queries. I can see now that our Saturday morning breakfasts with these three young men provided a spiritual "safe house." Kids not only need a secure setting to sort out their beliefs. They also want adults to acknowledge that faith is ultimately their choice.

### **Oppressive rules**

A third area to consider is a smothering legalism that hovers over many Christian schools. Interviews with young adult graduates from Christian schools revealed deeply felt exasperation on this topic. Legalism hindered and even crushed their desire to be a Christian. C.S. Lewis also wrote about this problem in the same book. The danger, he says, occurs when the law is taken so seriously that more law is added to pro-

tect us from breaking God's law. He continues saying: "The list of things forbidden will increase, till to get through a single day without supposed sin becomes like an elaborate step-dance, and this horrible network breeds self-righteousness in some and haunting anxiety in others. Meanwhile, the 'weightier matters of the Law,' righteousness itself, (justice, mercy, love, kindness), shrinks into insignificance under this vast overgrowth, so that the legalists strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. Thus the law...can take on a cancerous life of its own and work against the thing for whose sake it existed. The point is this: a dog on a short rope produces a very different creature than one given some measure of latitude."


Christian school administrators, teachers and board members, with the help of parents and students, should thoroughly examine their rule structure. For example, the dress code is often a legalistic battlefield. A good dress code can address modesty issues without dictating style. Giving students a voice in the process can help Christian schools avoid the trap of legalism.

In addition, Christian schools should investigate any rote religious exercises or traditions that have become irrelevant to students. For example, a student who repeats a Christian pledge when his heart is far away learns to give only lip service to his faith. Clearly that is not what God wants (Matthew 15:8). A Christmas program that showcases a school but feels utterly humiliating to teen students can't enhance spiritual growth. It is time to look hard at the ways we may be alienating this generation.

### **Connectedness**

As Christian students move into their preteen and teen years, teachers — just like parents — have to adjust their approach to

be less authoritarian and more relational. Authoritarianism is a monologue. Adolescents respond to relationship. Relationship is a dialogue that spells respect to one coming of age because, after all, the goal is to work our way out of a job. Teachers may default to an authoritarian approach when they are not confident relationally. Kids respond to authenticity, humor and a teacher who listens to and acknowledges their feelings. Therefore, teacher training should include development of communication skills as it pertains to relating with preteens and teens.

Sadly, we are living in a time when there are many prodigal sons and daughters. Sometimes parents and teachers do all they can, but, still, cultural influences overwhelm their best efforts. But I have come to believe that the inward prodigal as represented by the elder brother in the same biblical story is a condition that is far more dangerous. The child who grows up in a religious environment but misses the relationship with God has acquired a spiritual deficit and is, therefore, especially vulnerable. A Christian home, school, or church, *not the secular world*, is the place where this happens. Our call is to make sure it does not. 

# The Silent Majority



Nancy Knol  
Column Editor  
njknol@aol.com

I was the fourth of five girls in my family. We got pretty competitive and pretty nasty at times. My poor father used to joke about being the only male in the house. His standing joke was that every night when he tucked us in, he would whisper into the ear of each daughter a single word: "Elope."

The thing is, when you come from a fairly large family like mine, you can easily get ignored. Usually the ones with the greatest needs came first. Finances were limited, so two of the five daughters got braces on their teeth, even though we all could have benefited from them. We have the most photographs of the oldest and the youngest children — I suppose because the first-born is so spectacular and new, and the last born is the last of everything, and, therefore, important to remember as the parents, a little guiltily, breathe a sigh of relief at completing a more formidable task than they had bargained for.

As a middle child, I wore hand-me-downs from my sisters throughout my childhood — the first time I ever got anything new that I can recall in terms of clothing was in high school. The only exception to this was an occasional dress made for me by my dear grandmother, who sometimes even let me pick out the material I wanted.

Why am I talking about this in a column about teaching? Because I think it relates to an issue that is rarely spoken of but is, nonetheless, important in our schools. The issue extends from elementary to middle to high school. It has to do with recognition. Who are the students who get our attention? In my opinion, it is most often the two ends of the spectrum — the very needy and the very capable. I will use my own school situation to make my point here, but I suspect that most educators can make a parallel to their own experience.

At our school we have a remarkable program which serves the needs of students who struggle in one or more subjects. A very thorough plan goes into place for them, which includes interviews with parents, former teachers, and various professionals. Teachers are hired to teach smaller classes in some cases, which go at a somewhat less strenuous pace. Tutors are hired. Contact is made on a regular basis with the classroom teacher to check on big assignments and progress. Many parents are grateful, and many students blossom under the gentle encouragement of an advocate. And this is as it should be.

We also offer many opportunities for students who excel. There are advanced placement classes, honors programs that fit into the regular classroom curriculum, writing contests, Fine Arts programs, extracurricular activities, and an Honors Convocation at the end of the year which gives recognition and small gifts to those who have gone far beyond basic expectations. These students shine, and they make us proud. We are blessed by what

they offer us.

But in between there is the largest population of all. These are the "middle children" if you will — the ones who move along at a fair pace and generally don't ask for much. They may do their work in some plodding but acceptable fashion, or they may be on the edge of "stardom," but their achievement is not quite spectacular enough to get the spotlight. As a general rule, they get and settle for the hand-me-downs.

I think we need to find a more deliberate, creative way to notice these students. There is no simple way to do so, but perhaps at least recognizing this fact is a beginning. This can be done in small ways. An English teacher gives an assignment and would like to share one or two that have been done well with the rest of the class. Probably no name is given, but just having one's own work held up as an example does wonders for one's self-esteem. Do we choose the best piece of writing, written by someone who has been acknowledged so many times before, or do we deliberately choose one that is simply good? This is one small example, but use your own imagination in your own classroom or extracurricular setting.

There are countless opportunities, big and small, to embrace a broader section of the student population. Sometimes those steady, reliable "middle" students represent us most honestly and humbly. And sometimes they rise to the honor of the opportunity in ways that astonish. Our confidence in them fuels their desire to push their own limits.

When my grandmother made me my own dress, I felt a little more remarkable, and more importantly, a little more loved. Recognition has a way of singling us out and naming us. Why are we so stingy? ☺

## Orange City Christian School in Iowa

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# Good Classroom Management Linked to Lesser Teen Alienation from School

*A report issued by the University of Minnesota*

The results of a report published in April 2002 by the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) provide the first in-depth look at school connectedness — a student's feeling of being part of and cared for at school. Previous research suggests that school connectedness helps protect teenagers against a number of risky behaviors because it has been linked with lower levels of substance use, violence, suicidal thoughts and attempts, pregnancy, and emotional distress.

## **Among the major findings:**

1. At schools that have classrooms where students get along with each other, pay attention, and hand in assignments on time, teenagers report substantially stronger feelings of connectedness than do other teens.

2. Classroom size, long a concern of parents, is not related to students' connection to school.

3. School size is related to how students feel about school: as school size increases, school connectedness declines.

4. Teachers' experience or completion of an advanced degree has no bearing on school connectedness.

## **Need for respect**

"What goes on in the classroom is key to keeping kids from becoming disenchanted with school," said study author Robert Blum, M.D., Ph.D., professor and director of the University of Minnesota's Center for Adolescent Health and Development. "It doesn't matter whether you have 20 or 30 kids in a class. It doesn't matter whether the teacher has a graduate degree. What matters is the environment that a student enters when he walks through the classroom door. "Do students treat each other with respect? Do they get along well with the teacher? Do they pay attention in class and complete their assignments on time? These are the important questions."

The study analysis of school connectedness is based on written surveys filled out during the 1994-95 academic year by 71,515 students in 127 schools. In addition, administrators at participating schools completed questionnaires about school policies and procedures, teacher characteristics, and student body characteristics. Thus, Add Health is the only current, nationally representative data set with information on school attributes and on students' feelings of school connectedness. The data set is also the most extensive body of information on friendship networks and groups in school.

Blum and his colleagues found that the average level of school connectedness among all schools is 3.64 on a scale of 1 to 5, indicating that most students feel more than moderately connected to their schools. There were no schools where the majority of students felt totally disconnected; nor were there any schools in which all students felt fully engaged.

## **Classroom climate**

The survey results show that overall school connectedness is high in schools whose classrooms are places where students get along with each other and with their teachers, are engaged in learning, and complete their assignments. "This speaks to the ability of teachers to make kids feel they are important members of the school," Blum said. "Other research has shown that when teachers are empathetic and consistent, allow students to manage themselves, and encourage them to make decisions, the classroom is a better place — and so is the school."

Teacher experience and additional schooling such as a master's degree were unrelated to students' feelings about school. "Teachers can acquire the skills needed to create good classroom environments," Blum said. "But this has to be a

school-wide phenomenon in order to make a difference. We can't expect one hour a day in a well-run classroom to change a kid's life."

## **School size**

School size was *the only structural characteristic* associated with school connectedness; as school size increases, school connectedness declines. The relationship is consistent, but it is not strong. Schools surveyed ranged in size from a school with just 42 students to mega-schools with more than 5,000 students.

"In smaller schools, students, teachers, and school administrators all have more personal relationships with each other," said Blum. "They know who you are. This is important to keep kids engaged and a part of school." And there is such a thing as too small, Blum cautioned. "Other research has shown that optimal high school enrollment seems to be between 600 and 900 students," he said. When high school enrollment falls below 600 students, academic achievement tends to suffer because schools that small have few resources. When school enrollment burgeons to more than about 1,200, both connectedness and academic achievement diminish.

Blum and his colleagues found that class size is not associated with school connectedness, although classes do tend to be larger in large schools. Average class size was just under 23 students.

## **School discipline policies**

The researchers found that school connectedness is lower in schools with harsher discipline policies — for example, zero-tolerance policies that impose out-of-school suspension or even expulsion for a first-time offense. But Blum cautioned that it is not clear from the data whether harsh discipline policies make students feel less connected to school or whether some other

# Christian Education Is Also Mission Work

Hank de Jong



Scott VanderKooy



factor is causing the correlations.


"Still," Blum noted, "this finding may be relevant to the debate on zero-tolerance policies, which are intended to make schools safer. We found that students in schools with those types of discipline policies actually report feeling less safe at school than do students in schools with more moderate policies."

According to the Add Health data, nearly 40 percent of schools give out-of-school suspension the first time a student is caught smoking, but only four percent of schools give out-of-school suspension the first time a student is caught cheating.

## Notes:

The findings of the study are available in two articles:

Blum, R.W., McNeely, C.A., Rinehart, P.M. (2002) "Improving the odds: The untapped power of schools to improve the health of teens." Center for Adolescent Health and Development, University of Minnesota. Copies of this publication (up to three) may be obtained by contacting the Center for Adolescent Health, University of Minnesota, Suite 260, 200 Oak Street S.E., Minneapolis MN 55455-2002, e-mail: aph@umn.edu.

McNeely, C.A., Nonnemaker, J.M., Blum, R.W. (2002) "Promoting Student Connectedness to School: Evidence from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health." *Journal of School Health*, Vol. 72 (4). 

## CEJ staff

ANCASTER, Ont. — Worldwide Christian Schools (WWCS) is doing anything but standing still. Just a year ago it adopted a new vision statement that speaks boldly of glorifying God "by ensuring that all people have access to Christian education."

That this statement resembles Christ's missionary mandate of Matthew 28: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations" is no accident. Scott VanderKooy, president of Worldwide Christian Schools U.S.A., says that he disagrees "with those who say that Christian education is not evangelism." According to him Christian education is the most effective means Christians have of sharing the love of Christ.

Christian education does three things, says VanderKooy. It confronts children with the need to make a decision about Christ; it provides them with teachers, five days a week, who can serve as models of the Christian life; and it equips them so that they can eventually transform their communities.

VanderKooy hopes that WWCS can reach out to other organizations so that this worldwide mandate can be realized. He believes that this is the time for Christian education to stand alongside other mission-driven efforts. VanderKooy himself researches field development in Asia and South America, Steve Geurink looks after the Caribbean and Central America, and Dale Dielman oversees Africa, North America and Europe.

## A Canadian effort

What may not be known to many is that Worldwide Christian Schools is really two independent organizations. One is WWCS U.S.A.; the other, WWCS Canada.

The Canadian organization looks to its

stronger counterpart in the U.S.A. for doing research and establishing field priorities. But for the rest, it


works in its own fields and raises its own funds. It is led by newly appointed executive director Hank de Jong. De Jong, who is a graduate of Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ont., works with Mission Services in Hamilton, Ont., and has been actively involved in spreading the Good News in Hamilton for Streetlight Ministries.

Although de Jong's role is still part-time he hopes the work will expand so he can become full-time director. He is assisted in his work by Rev. John Postuma, who is full-time director of ministry development.

De Jong says he has a heart for missions. "I love to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with children and help them reach their potential — break the cycle of poverty."

The Canadian organization focuses on building and supporting Christian schools in Central American countries such as the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Nicaragua and Honduras. Right now it is specifically busy in the Dominican Republic, which has a large Christian community.

Worldwide Christian Schools sends out teams called HANDS, which stands for "Help Another Nation Develop Schools." These teams, which may consist of 10 to 15 people who spend anywhere from one to two weeks in other countries, build schools and hand them over to a local Christian community as a gift. "Team members are our best promoters," says de Jong.

Worldwide Christian Schools currently works in 34 different countries. It has been involved in over 165 school building projects. At least 42,000 children in these schools are learning about the lordship of Jesus Christ over creation. 



# Slouching Toward Bedlam

## Withering Heights, or More Misérable

by Jan Kaarsvlam

*Over the summer, Jan Kaarsvlam toured much of the United States and Canada with the Leviticus 8:23 Christian Puppet Theater. He had intended to continue with this vocation during the school year, but "The Slaughter of the Ammonites" offended parent groups and vegetarians alike. Since quitting that job, Jan Kaarsvlam has enjoyed a restful summer and is looking forward to beginning his new position as curriculum coordinator for CSI District 3.*

Maxwell Prentiss-Hall, Bedlam's young counselor, walked unsteadily through the door of the faculty lounge. His eyes were distant, perplexed, as if he had just stumbled upon a chunk of liverwurst at a sushi bar. He bumped into geometry teacher Jane VanderAsch, spilling her coffee on her white blouse. She glowered at him, but he failed to note he had caused the mishap. As he pushed past her, she grew angrier.

"Aren't you even going to say you're sorry?" she demanded.

"Huh? Oh, I'm sorry, Jane, I am just having such a troubling morning. I am in the midst of a real dilemma and it really has me...um, well, kerflumoxed, I guess."

Jane frowned. It was only third period, and so far she had dealt with Tony, who was four months behind on his homework and it was only October; Nelson and Ruthy who were trying to lip-lock in the back row; Dennis, whose tee shirt violated the dress code in ways she hadn't thought possible; and Bobby, who was wearing his walkman in class and singing the Beatles' "Maxwell's Silver Hammer" at the top of his lungs, and then was dumbfounded when she kicked him out of class.

"What's the problem?" asked Jane. She sincerely tried to look concerned, but she was still cheesed about the stain on her blouse, and, frankly, she didn't think Maxwell's problems could hold a candle to her own that particular morning. Still, he was young, and she felt an obligation to try to encourage him. She gave what she thought was a forgiving and encouraging curl of her lips, but her face looked more like a snarl than a smile, probably because the muscles in her cheeks moved that way so frequently. Fortunately, Maxwell, despite being a counselor, could not read body language or facial expression, and he jumped at the chance to explain his problem.

"I've got a student who stopped in," he said, nervously, "a girl. She feels alienated and insulted by Mr., um . . . , well, by a male teacher. He said something inappropriate, and I don't know what to do about it."

"Well, what did Mr. 'Um' say to this girl?" Jane demanded. Suddenly the stain on her blouse and the problems of the morning didn't seem so important. Jane could recall all too well cer-

tain experiences from her days as a high school student. Too many male teachers had made sexually suggestive com-

ments or gestures, always just "joking," of course. She had a low threshold for this kind of harassment.

Maxwell looked more nervous and seemed to break out in a sweat. "Well, I don't want to break confidence or in any way be unprofessional.... It is just that it is so.... Um..."

"Spill it, Maxwell!" Jane thought that perhaps she had put a little too much of her commanding voice into her request, but it had the desired effect. Maxwell swallowed hard and began talking rapidly in one long sentence.

"Well, see, Ophelia Hansen was talking to me and she is on the golf team, you know, and she said that Coach Carpenter was angry with her because she wasn't doing as well at golf as her older brother Trinculo and older sister Cordelia — you remember she made state finals her senior year — and so he suggested that maybe she wasn't even a Hansen and that maybe she...um... was adopted or related to the milkman or something."

A rare moment: Jane was speechless. Fortunately, or unfortunately, depending on your viewpoint, gym teacher Rex Kane had entered just in time to hear Maxwell's last comment.

"Aw, man," Rex said, "is Red back at it again? Just yesterday I walked into the library and caught him trash-talking the Encyclopedia Britannica salesman."

Both Max and Jane stared at Rex, who smiled and shrugged. Then he pointed at the stain on Jane's blouse. "I think your belly button is leaking."

Jane stepped between Rex and Max, turning her back completely on the gym teacher. "Listen, Max," she said, "What Red said is completely out of line. It is not unprofessional to report him; it would be unprofessional to overlook that kind of comment."

Gordon Winkle woke from his doughnut-induced stupor in the corner and joined in the conversation. "Oh, come on, Jane. Give the guy a break. Lots of times I say things without really thinking about it. It's not like you can watch every word you say."

At that, Jane went off. "Of course you can watch every word you say! You have to. How can you be a teacher, a member of a profession in which you have to communicate with words, and not at least be careful that you don't question a child's parentage?"

Winkle looked hurt, and also looked like he really needed a cream-filled doughnut. "Well," he said in a hurt voice, "nobody's perfect."

"You're absolutely right, Gord," said Sam Toomer, the staff's



biology teacher.

He was normally excitable, but his voice this morning was calm and subdued, and his colleagues felt mesmerized by its placidity in the midst of what was threatening to become a brouhaha in the staff room. "But even if nobody's perfect, that is not an excuse for the kind of hurtful comments far too many teachers make, going for the cheap laugh or trying hard to assert their "coolness" to their charges. We live in a culture where so many kids feel alienated — alienated from their parents, their churches, their schools, their government, their God."

"You can't be suggesting that such alienation is all because of some loose-lipped teachers?" Gord said incredulously. Sam did not answer immediately, and from his eyes the others in the room could see he was in a far off place.


"Back when I was in high school," he finally said, still looking off into empty air, into his past, "I sat in a history class with this teacher. He was loud and obnoxious, always telling jokes. A lot of kids liked him. One day, he started yelling at this boy Chris

who sat in the front row. I don't remember exactly what it was about (the

boy didn't have his homework done or something that day), but I know even at the time I thought the teacher was being a jerk. He kept teasing Chris about being lazy. Other kids in class laughed, so the teacher pushed Chris harder and harder until finally he snapped and told the teacher to go to hell. Then the teacher blew up, threw him out of class. He followed Chris to the door, waited until the boy was down the hall, then turned back toward us, and he was laughing. Laughing!"

Silence filled the room like a noxious gas.

"I became a teacher at least partly because of Chris," Sam said. "I didn't want students to have to suffer the torture I saw him go through. And I'm sad that it is still happening today."

Just then the door swung open and in came Red Carpenter. People stared uncomfortably at their coffee mugs or grade books. Some silently remembered horror stories from their own years as students; others joined Red in wondering what was for hot lunch the next day. 





# Science in a Jar: *Egg Sacs and Awe*

by Erika Knight Bakker

*Erika Knight Bakker (jonathan.bakker@nau.edu) enjoyed several years of teaching at Vernon Christian School in British Columbia. She's now thrilled with her new job as stay-at-home mom in Flagstaff, Arizona.*

I don't necessarily endorse the classroom pet. I long to bring students and the environment together, but not by way of a mouse on a treadmill or even an iguana in a large mesh cage. Despite this, several jars have been occupied in my classroom, most frequently by spiders and, incredibly, their delicate sacs of eggs.

Over the five years I have taught Grade 2, I developed a unit on spiders. Part of the learning involved "observational research." A glass aquarium and several jars lined a shelf and provided temporary housing for spiders found during recess or at students' homes. (I was alarmed to receive a Black Widow one morning, found in a boy's garage.) A few students at a time would watch the spiders and record their behavior, anatomy and other descriptions in our logbook. The spiders stayed for a day or two, spun webs before our eyes, helped us complete diagrams of spider body parts, and were released at 3 p.m.

## Little faith

The first time egg sacs were mentioned, it was by way of a squeaky voice bragging, "I found spider eggs at my house." I'm afraid I didn't believe Kaily, for she had described so many stories of grand adventures. I don't

remember my response anymore. I hope I gave a "that's nice" or even a positive "oh." I have a feeling, though, that I used the opportunity to dive into an eloquent spiel about staying focused on the task at hand, and how her spelling was not yet finished, and Josiah was already heading out the door for recess which is where I wanted to be in one minute or less.

I have that feeling because the next morning, when her father handed me a carefully arranged glass jar complete with four sacs of spider eggs, I felt ashamed. To compensate, I displayed plenty of excitement for the new exhibit, used it for a life cycle project I had planned on doing the following Friday and allowed little Kaily to be the first to enter sentences in a new logbook. At the end of the day, Kaily proudly carried her jar to the parking lot with several students in tow.

## Unexpected invasion

The following year, when a student declared he had found several spider egg sacs, I believed him and immediately showed enthusiasm. They were brought in, used for several projects and placed in a jar on my desk. We had meant to return the collection to its natural environment at the end of the day, but forgot. The next morning, as I went to lay my books on my desk, I noticed some slight movements. I had to look twice. Hundreds, probably thousands of spiderlings, each about the size of a pinhead, were crawling all over my desk. Little webs had been constructed across the stapler, over the mouth of my mug, between

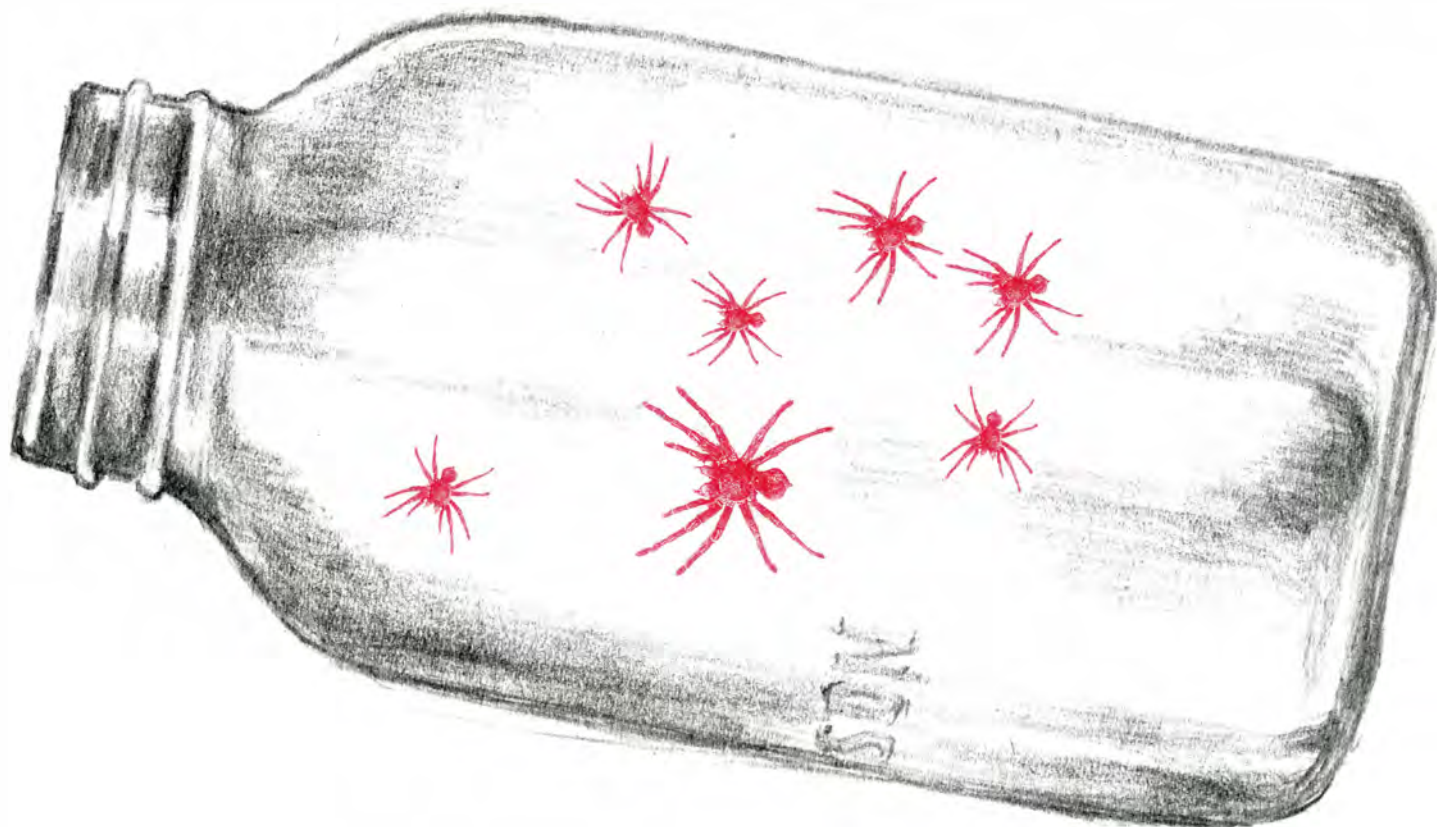
pencils and along my husband's smiling picture. When punching the spiders' air holes, we had failed to think about size.

The third year, the eggs hatched soon after the sacs were brought into our classroom. This time, the glass jar and lid proved adequate and the day was full of wonderful learning. With only ten minutes left in the day, Stephen brought the jar toward his desk for some personal observation time. Somehow the jar slipped through his fingers and shattered on the linoleum.

Instantly, 25 students rushed toward the scene, 32,000 spiderlings headed for freedom, and one teacher yelled, "Freeze!" (The students listened, but the spiderlings continued to run.) It felt like a scene from a Robert Munsch book. Parents arrived to see their children on the fringes of the room, gently encouraging spiderlings to crawl onto prostrate pieces of paper. The obedient creatures were carefully brought outdoors while I cleaned up the glass. Occasionally a child pleaded from across the room, "Don't come in, Mom. You'll kill the spiders!"

## Sounding the alarm

I was thrilled the following spring when the spiderlings emerged from their egg sacs while under Gregory's care. The unkempt boy and his cruel antics had sent me to my knees and my wit's end on several occasions. But the Lord decided to bless Gregory that day, not only with finding three prestigious egg sacs (we housed them in a plastic jar!) but also by having the spiderlings emerge while on his desk. It



was in the middle of a math class when Gregory called out, "Spiderlings!"

To hear him call out was not unusual, but for him to be excited and happy, was. The typically sullen boy was beaming. Students scrambled around him, and I saw another student's arm resting on Gregory's shoulder as he leaned in for a better look. We watched the tiny creatures emerge from an egg sac and fall the inch and a half to the bottom of the container. Every second, several spiderlings jumped out until the bottom of the container was a moving sea of minute spiders. Then, spiderlings began to crawl out from the other two egg sacs. We all watched in wonder as the jar filled up with the tiniest creatures, each fully coordinated to use its eight legs, each seemingly on a mission.


"We have to let them go!" Gregory

spoke suddenly. "We have to let them go now. They're trying to find a piece of grass or something to climb up so they can jump into a breeze and go ballooning to find a place to live. They can't all live here together." I was amazed at his clarity and that he had learned something during our lifecycle project last week. We all put on our shoes and headed down into the field. Once we decided on a suitable spot, we lay on our stomachs in the grass. With obvious compassion, Gregory opened the container and quietly encouraged the spiderlings to leave their plastic home.

### **Sense of wonder**

A casual enjoyment of the environment brings about questions, discussions, excitement and lots of scope for the imagination. To see new life emerge from an egg

sac provided a gentle yet bold announcement of a Creator. To view a moving creature the size of a pinhead, complete with eight legs, three body parts and working spinnerets inspired awe. And to see the spiderlings immediately head off into the big world induced the children's admiration as well as a sadness: didn't they miss their family?

Nurturing a child's awe is a wonderful goal for any lesson plan. Recognizing the intricacies of egg sacs and spinnerets as well as the complexity of a life cycle prepares students for far more than the next science test. It builds a critical foundation to their worldview that recognizes the environment for what it is: God's creation. Who knew this could happen by watching spiders in a jar? 



# Pluralism and Tolerance

*Clarence Joldersma (cjolders@calvin.edu), professor of education at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich., asked the Dot Edu panel to consider the following question: We live in a religiously pluralist society. How should we deal with this as teachers in our Christian schools? Ought we to teach our students tolerance of non-Christian religions? Ought we to tell them that the truth of each religion exists only within that religious perspective? Should we teach our students to learn how to criticize other religious traditions and learn how to argue for the superiority of Christianity? In short, how do we live as Christian schools in a religiously pluralist society?*

**August 28, 2003**

We should teach our students to respect all people. All are made in God's image and all have a hunger for God. Each person feels a need for the transcendent.

We should teach our students that often people respond to this hunger by seeking answers through religions that may have only a small piece of the answer.

We should teach them to be understanding of people who don't have the whole truth. Learning about other religions is one way of fostering understanding. Teaching them to argue for the superiority of Christianity is a counterproductive tactic. Instead we should teach them to be grateful for the wonderful blessing they have been given and to share this blessing with others by teaching them to reach out in love.

**Pam**



Pam Adams

**August 31, 2003**

Yes, I agree with you, Pam. I would say, too, that as Christians we should go one step (maybe more) beyond tolerance. The word tolerance comes from the Latin *tolerare* meaning to endure; in other words, we endure those who hold a different view from our own.

Not only that! I think as Christians we are called to love our neighbors who have other religious views, not just tolerate or endure them. We are asked to love and respect them, the way Jesus did, always praying that they, too, will learn to know our Savior, possess fullness of joy, have the peace that passes all understanding, and experience the love of God in their hearts. Other religions always have a works-righteousness perspective; we know



Johanna Campbell

what grace is and we long to see others experience it as well.

So we view those of differing religions with love and respect, we do not coerce them into our belief — faith is a gift from God, and we recognize that truth does divide people by its very nature. It is in that frame of mind that we teach about other religions and cultures.

**Johanna**

**September 3, 2003**

Both of your comments on religious diversity are reassuring to those of us living and working with teenagers in pluralist communities. I am not an expert in replying to these issues, but high school religion teachers are. What I hear from them is that this is the most difficult issue for our adolescents, right up there with why there is suffering and sin. Indeed, sometimes this is a stumbling block to "the faith." We Christians are seen to be arrogant in our sure faith.

One way Christian high school religion teachers help their students through this is to show how Christ can be seen as the fulfillment of other important religious paths and quests. Again, this is done with love and tolerance, respecting the many paths in each tradition.

Another way is to concentrate on identifying core truths, misconceptions about practices, and unsubstantiated assumptions about each religious tradition, something that can be done in a public school context as well. Also, I have seen teachers return to a discussion of our own view of God, his grace and love, and of our understanding of his kingdom as a place of shalom. They challenge teenagers towards response. Rather than stumbling over the conjectures about truths in other religions, are we seeking to live in our own truths, and living the Christian way of life as understood in shalom?



Lois Brink



Clarence Joldersma

In this look at approaches to a complex issue, I have, no doubt, overlooked some important element, or been glib where I should have been deftive. Have you all any other observations?

Lois

## September 6, 2003

Lois, you mentioned that we need to live our own "truths" before our students, showing what it means to live in shalom. I think that is the challenge for all of us: is our life authentic? Do we as Christian teachers practice what we preach? As Isaiah 58 says, we can be very religious and be eager to approach our God, but our hearts can be full of wickedness. We need to model the wonderful relationship that a human being can have with the living God.

Our students need to see us draw on his power for our every day life; nothing less will do. If our lives do not send out this fragrance of Christ, our students will not want it. They must see the difference between Christianity and other religions by the lives of the adult Christians around them.

Johanna

## September 8, 2003

How do we guard against exuding a sense of paternalism with the approach described above? In conversations with some Hindus I have gotten the sort of feeling from them that says, "Well, yes, Christianity does have its exclusivist claims, doesn't it now. That's not uncommon among the less nuanced religions."



Tony Kamphuis

Can we take our students' very real interest in "the truth" and address that honestly while saying, "Well, yes, but Christianity does have its 'grace-righteousness' you know, and we needn't enter into the messy business of apologetics in order to remove obstacles to faith for people. Instead we should simply love them and tolerate their less finely-tuned response to their inherent religious impulses".

Maybe I have too much of a residual Enlightenment strain, but I want to show students a Christianity that can take on the tough questions of life and provide credible answers. I want to say to students, "But to accept the line of thinking held to by that group leads people in this direction, and that's not 'life-giving' or 'positive' or 'shalom-fostering'." Are these legitimate statements to make? Is it possible to do this and still encourage a humility borne of the fact that we've done nothing to deserve our mem-

bership in this fantastic covenant?

Tony

## The panel consists of:

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

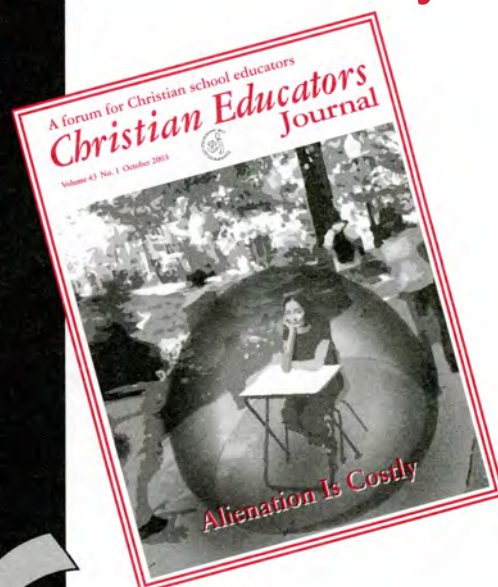
**Lois Brink** (LBrink@grcs.org), curriculum coordinator and media director at Grand Rapids Christian High School, Grand Rapids, Mich.

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

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

**Tony Kamphuis** (TonyKamp@aol.com), executive director of the Niagara Association for Christian Education. He lives in Smithville, Ont. 

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# Inviting the Holy Spirit Into Our Classrooms

*Tena Siebenga-Valstar is a former teacher and principal, who recently graduated with a Ph.D. at the University of Alberta. We encourage all teachers and principals to submit a question for this column, even if they think they know the answer. Send your question(s) to Dr. Siebenga-Valstar, 168 Windsor Dr., Fort McMurray, Alta., T9H 4R2, or e-mail her at tvalstar@telus.net.*

## A constant companion

### Question #1

I sometimes feel uncomfortable when other staff members talk about inviting the Holy Spirit into the classroom. Isn't the Holy Spirit, who is one with God, already in our classrooms?

### Response:

I believe that each faith community or denomination uses certain words which may not necessarily be fully understood by those outside that community. Often those words have to be understood within a historical context.

In the historic creeds of the Christian church (the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed) emphasis is placed on the Trinity: God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Belgic confession, written in 1567 and considered one of the oldest doctrinal standards of the churches that have Reformed in their name, affirms the "doctrine of the holy Trinity" as stated in these creeds. The Heidelberg Catechism (1563) adopted by many European churches of the Reformation, states that the Holy Spirit, "as well as the Father and the Son, is eternal God" and "has been given to me personally (1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Gal. 4:6), so that, by true faith, he makes me share in Christ and his blessings, comforts me, and remains in me forever."

F. D. Bruner, in a case study of the doctrine and experience of the Holy Spirit, discusses the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the focus on the Holy Spirit in the Pentecostal assembly or worship service. He states "the non-Pentecostal feels that the divine acts and speaks in a special way through the preached Word of the ordained minister and perhaps even in a general way in the hearing, confession, prayer, and sung praise of the congregation. The Pentecostal, however, feels that the divine speaks throughout the entire service in a special way through the entire congregation, at different times, in different manners, and by different persons" (*A Theology of the Holy Spirit*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 1970. p. 137).

Bruner states that the congregation "feels itself in constant readiness for divine invasion" much like that experienced at Pentecost. He also indicates that "the more subtle or mental gifts of

the Holy Spirit" — e.g., knowledge, wisdom, teaching, administration — receive less emphasis than in non-Pentecostal churches (p. 149).

Given this background, I believe it is possible that two Christian staff members may have different viewpoints on the experience of the Holy Spirit. Dialogue with fellow staff members may reveal this, but also cause one to focus on Act 2: 38-39: "Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you, for your children, and for all who are far away, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him.'"

## Overwhelming first-grade stuff

### Question #2

I am just beginning to teach at the first grade level. I have all of these phonics and language books in front of me. How do I start teaching language arts on the first day?

### Response:

I cannot give you a prescription of what you should do, but from my experience I will share what I believe you can do and, in the process, can learn about the children in your classroom. Your first day of interaction will give you an idea of where the students are in their learning and thus allow you to build on that information.

I would begin with introductions and devotions. Devotions can include songs with which you think the children will be familiar. If you have these on charts, you can indicate directionality and some familiar words. Many teachers use a calendar activity each day which consists of interchangeable words (underlined in script), such as: Today is Tuesday, September 2, 2003. Yesterday was Monday. Tomorrow will be Wednesday. Today is the first day of school. The weather is sunny.

You might want to read a book to the children which focuses on the beginning of the school year. Encourage interaction from the students as you "read the cover," make prediction as to what the story might be about, talk about the main character, indicate directionality of print, "read" the pictures, enjoy the story and confirm predictions.

A follow-up activity may include writing or drawing about the story. This gives an opportunity to determine which of the writing principles or skills of early literacy are being utilized by the children. In order to give the children a sense of accomplishment



Tena Siebinga-Valstar  
valstar@telusplanet.net

in being able to read or write, a lesson may also be taught using the words, "I can ...." The children give oral responses, which the teacher writes on the board or on paper which is inserted in the pocket chart. The students can then write on their own paper and draw about the activity.

You might want to check with the kindergarten teacher to determine what your expectations can be for the majority of the children. Because you are teaching young, active children interperse your activities with action songs and physical activities.

Trust your own experience and intuition. If you know of something that worked well in your practicum, use it. The school may have a program which is being used. If so, determine from the principal how closely you must adhere to it. Many teachers follow a literature-based program which involves predictable books. So find one with which you feel comfortable and enjoy the process of teaching and learning.

## Hope based on promise

### Question #3

Is there hope for Christian Education? As novice teachers and sometimes more experienced teachers reflect on Christian Education, they have asked this question of me.

### Response:

Yes, there is hope for Christian education. The aim of Christian education is to serve our faithful God and to give glory to him in all that we do. We serve a faithful God who promises to be with us always and calls us to be obedient in doing his will.


Teachers know that they have to work with students at their varying levels of learning and understanding. So it is with the whole Christian school community. There are varying levels of understanding of Christian education among teachers, parents, board and committee members. I have had the blessing and privilege of being able to teach a Christian perspective course to both beginning and experienced teachers, and I am thrilled with their desire to learn and be open to new understandings of teaching Christianly. The desire to serve Christ in their teaching is evident.

Some teachers have been blessed to have received training at a college or university which offers teacher education from a Christian perspective. These teachers have an obligation to share their expertise with those who seek to teach curriculum from a Christian perspective but have not had the same opportunities. When I hear of this being done both locally and regionally, I have hope

for Christian education.

When boards of Christian Schools focus the professional development of their teaches on a greater understanding of what it means to teach Christianly, then I have hope. When I see a struggling Christian school community continue to walk in faith and stand as a beacon of light in their community, then I have hope. When I see students grasp the reality of who God is and what they are called to do in the classroom and eventually in the world, then I have hope.

When each of us within the Christian school community can come to a greater understanding of who we are in relationship to God, our fellow human beings and the creation, and when they then act in obedient response to God, I have hope.

Finally and above all else, yes, I believe there is hope for Christian Education because Jesus said in Matthew 28:20, "And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age." 



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# The Church, the Home and the School:

## *A Partnership Re-examined*

by Daniel Ribera

Daniel Ribera ([dribera@bellevuechristian.org](mailto:dribera@bellevuechristian.org)) is principal of Mack Elementary School in Woodinville, Washington.

A common question asked on Christian school teacher applications is, “*What is the relationship between the home, church and school?*” It is also a topic frequently appearing in Christian school promotional literature. No doubt you have seen a title like this one, “Our Biblical Partnership: Home, Church and School.” The relationship is often described using the image of a three-legged stool, or the tripod, stable and balanced. A weak leg would mean instability and a shaky structure.

I believe there is validity in such a partnership, but I question the assumption that such a partnership is a biblical imperative. Instead, I will suggest that, like the odd pattern that stands out in a matching game, the school is the image that does not belong in this set. Here is a radical thought: could it be that we ought to see the church and the home partnered with the state?

That suggestion may draw either cheers or jeers. Before you think it was intended to be a liberal political statement, I want to say, this has nothing to do with favoring any particular government, nor am I promoting state-controlled schools. Rather, I am suggesting that biblically these three institutions (home, church and state) have something in common, something the school does not share.

What these three have in common is that God specifically ordains each agency in

Scripture; they model the nature of the Godhead and the work of God among his people, and they present a picture of God’s people in glory.

### Three ordinations

God ordained the family for the purpose of modeling the covenant relationship of the Godhead, as well as the relationship between Christ and his bride. It is the place

story of God and his people. The family nurtures children and models love.

Christ ordained the church as the people of God. Its members are called to be worshippers and to make worshippers of the world. The sacraments and the preaching of the Word are central to its life. The church serves this priestly function of ministering the grace and mercy of the cross of Christ to the world. The church produces worshippers of God through evangelism, missions, discipleship, and diaconal ministries.

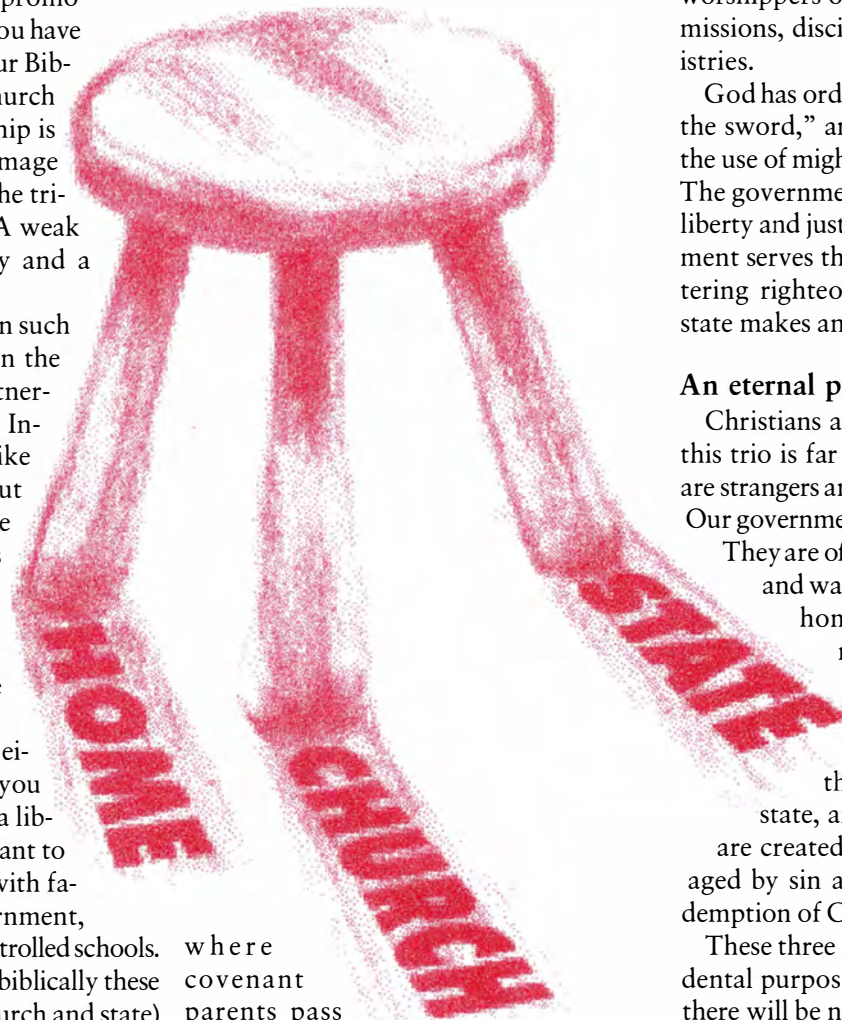
God has ordained governments to “bear the sword,” an expression that speaks of the use of might for protection and justice. The government is mandated to proclaim liberty and justice in the land. The government serves this kingly function of ministering righteousness to its citizens. The state makes and protects citizens.

### An eternal purpose

Christians are not blind to the fact that this trio is far from perfect. We believers are strangers and pilgrims in a fallen world. Our governments are not faithful partners.

They are often antagonistic to our work and war against the church and the home. The fact is that sin has marred all of God’s good creation, including the institutions that he has ordained. The family and the church, no less than the state, are affected by sin. All three are created (mandated) by God, damaged by sin and are included in the redemption of Christ.

These three institutions have a transcendental purpose. Although on the last day there will be no marriage, earthly governments will cease, and the church will be caught up, these institutions do not end; rather, they come to fruition. In that day, the church universal will find its rest and



where covenant parents pass on the story of redemption and the faith of *their* parents to the next generation. Parents have a prophetic function in the world, telling the

joy in worshipping its heavenly Father, the bride will sit down to the wedding feast with her Savior, and the King of glory will reign with peace, justice and joy. In this sense the church, family, and state will be entirely redeemed, and the earthly models will find fulfillment in the heavenly reality.

One can only guess the nature of *schooling* in the new heaven and the new earth where “we will know even as we are known.” Ignorance and illiteracy will be healed, and we will work and serve with all of our gifts, in strength and dignity. There will be no so-called dumb or stupid persons. Creation and work will not cease but will be regained and restored. The family of God, also called the bride of Christ, and the citizens of heaven, will be fruitful and will develop the new earth.

### Not God-ordained

So where does the Christian school fit in *now*? It is alright that the school is not ordained by God in Scripture the way these other institutions were. That does not make the school illegitimate; it simply gives it a different nature. The school, like the farm, the factory, the bank, or the computer company, is an institution made by people in the course of being faithful (or unfaithful) stewards on the earth. It is part of the cultural mandate. This perspective helps us not to expect the school to function as the more directly God-ordained institutions do.

The calling of the school is to support the church, the home, and the state. The school applies the Word of God to the material of creation. The school partners with parents as it nurtures covenant children who share the joys and sorrows of others. Students hear and respond to God speaking in and through the creation in math, science, art, and music.

The school partners with the church to produce worshippers, young people who

can hear and understand God speaking through his world and through his word. Pupils are taught to live and work in the presence of their God. In this regard, Sunday school is not as effective in my opinion and was perhaps created to fill a gap caused by Godless state schools.

The school should also partner with the state to produce citizens who are sojourners on this earth, who have their true citizenship in heaven, and who hold lightly to the things of the earth. The school encourages citizens whose goal is to spread peace and justice in the land. Citizens are to be good stewards of the resources of this earth.

### No biblical command

It is fair to say that the Christian school is indeed doing covenantal work. It is not fair to say we are the only institution called to do this work in the educational arena. While we need to continue to call Christian families to obedience in raising their children with a distinctively Christian education, we need to treat with more humility the idea that all should attend “our” school. I can make a strong argument for the Christian school, but I must not equate the force of my argument with a biblical command. I believe that is what the church has done with many of its extra-biblical traditions — practices which we wrongly suppose have their basis in Scripture. Genuine obedience may look different in the context of Christian school and home school, especially in this day when new methods of delivering education are being considered.

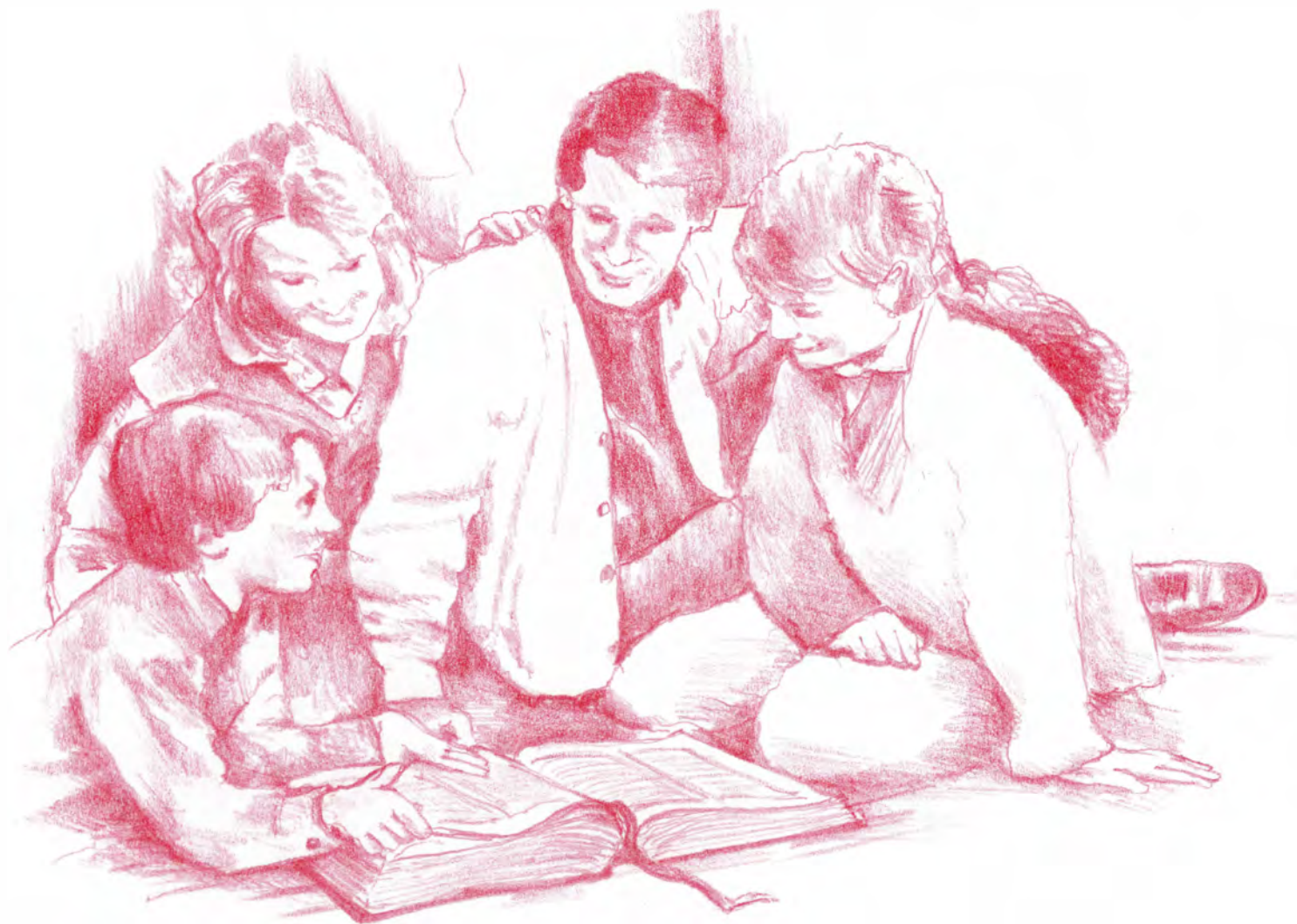
The Christian school is perhaps not equivalent with the family, the church and the state, but a solid partner with these nonetheless. This perspective allows us to be open and to appreciate those who make other schooling choices for their children. One Christian educator and author whom I respect has said, “Christian education for

all, Christian schooling for some.” The meaning here is that parents may fulfill their obligation to provide Christian education and nurturing through a variety of means, including Christian school, home school, family worship, godly discipline, personal devotions, church, Sunday school, and youth groups. It is entirely possible that parents with convictions and integrity will choose forms of schooling different from our own. My family’s convictions are so strong that my wife Laura and I choose to work in the Christian school and we would not send our children anywhere else. I know Christian brothers and sisters with equally strong convictions whom I am called to love and not judge.

Someone may suggest that this freedom to choose may adversely affect Christian school enrollment. I believe that as families consider the biblical mandate to Christian education, Christian schooling will continue to grow. But even if that were not the case, it is not worth compromising the biblical integrity upon which the Christian school is founded just to produce stronger numbers. ☪



# MORAL EDUCATION AND THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL



By James L. Drexler

*James L. Drexler (jdrexler@wcastl.org) is the upper school principal at Westminster Christian Academy in St. Louis, Missouri. His dissertation, "Character in the Schoolhouse: A Qualitative Assessment of the Moral Education in an independent Christian Academy," is available upon request.*

"Your mission statement makes some

bold claims about the character development of your students. How do you know if you are meeting those goals?"

Knowing full well that we had no empirical data to point to, it was difficult to answer this insightful question from a member of our visiting accreditation team. We could point to standardized test scores and college admission rates to "prove" that we were meeting our academic objectives, but what about our goals for moral education?

Just because we are a Christian school, can we assume that our students are learning value and ethical systems based on Scripture? Even if our students learn those principles, are they putting them into action? Perhaps most importantly, how can a student's moral maturity be assessed?

These questions were central not only for our school, but also for my Ph.D. work at Saint Louis University and dissertation on moral education. Although much has

been written and discussed, many conferences and workshops have been conducted, and many programs have been tried, very little research to assess and evaluate character education in schools has been completed, especially in our Christian schools. In this article, I want to review briefly the history of moral education, make the link between character development and religious faith, and describe what we have done to assess the character education goals at our school.

### **Functional communities**

Consistent research has shown that private schools produce better academic outcomes than their public counterparts. Although there continues to be a debate over the reasons — and public school defenders point to the selective admissions policies of some schools — most agree that private schools produce higher academic results.

In trying to account for these outcomes, James Coleman has theorized that private religious schools are examples of what he calls “functional communities,” communities that share the same values and beliefs, thus producing “social capital,” which in turn allows for the “inter-generational closure” necessary for supporting and encouraging a child’s growth into adulthood.<sup>1</sup> Coleman has argued that in addition to the physical capital (buildings and tools) and the human capital (knowledge and skills) that schools possess, there is a “social capital” which is equally important in terms of providing a nurturing environment for students.

A functional community is “a community in which social norms and sanctions, including those that cross generations, arise out of the social structure itself, and both reinforce and perpetuate that structure.”<sup>2</sup> These types of communities tend to have a common set of values and expectations

with strong generational bonds between adults and children, making the transfer of values easier. In other words, the inculcation of values and morals in the children within functional communities is accomplished more by parents, relatives, teachers, and respected peers than by television or gangs.

### **Decline in moral education**

A review of American history reveals that character education was a priority in public schools from colonial times through the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> Gradually, however, this emphasis declined. The reasons are various and include the growth of pluralism and individualism, the development of the Common School, and some key Supreme Court decisions in this century.<sup>4</sup> Many public schools simply stopped teaching formal character education because “they did not know how to provide it in a manner that was constitutionally permissible, educationally sound, and acceptable to all cultural and religious groups.”<sup>5</sup> Schools opted instead for situation ethics and values clarification. As a result, according to Christina Hoff Sommers, we are now living in a “moral stone age” where students suffer from “cognitive moral confusion” and as a society we are experimenting with “moral deregulation.”<sup>6</sup>

As teenage pregnancy, crime, drug use, and abortion statistics soared in the 1960s and 1970s, along with a breakdown of the family<sup>5</sup> and an erosion of trust,<sup>6</sup> a dramatic new interest in character education was evidenced across the country. “The 1960s celebrated the worth, autonomy, and subjectivity of the person, emphasizing individual rights and freedom over responsibility, and value education suffered.”<sup>7</sup> Reflecting the concerns of the culture, schools began to consider how character education could be reintroduced into the curriculum.

Numerous programs are now in existence and a recent poll conducted by Phi Delta Kappa revealed that more than 90 percent of Americans favor the teaching of values like honesty, respect and compassion in the schools.<sup>80</sup> In fact, Thomas Lickona notes that for the past two decades, parents have overwhelmingly supported the idea that schools provide “instruction that would deal with morals and moral behavior.”<sup>91</sup>

In addition, Public Law 103-301 endorsed character education in 1994, and it appears that character education programs have so far withstood the scrutiny of the Supreme Court (Vessels and Boyd, p. 56-60).

### **Real results?**

But has the increased attention on character education had an impact? Do these programs work? Have values been restored? Have the statistical trends been reversed? “The jury is still out on whether the current character education initiatives will make a marked impact on moral behavior among today’s young people.”<sup>102</sup>

James Davison Hunter, who puts much of the blame for our lack of moral education on the influence of psychology, laments that most moral education programs today are “unimpressive” and ineffective because the quest for an inclusive morality in theory has resulted in a hollow or empty morality in practice. “In sum, the subtext of an inclusive moral education is not the absence of morality, but rather the emptying of meaning and significance and authority from the morality that is advocated.”<sup>13</sup>

### **A moral community**

Moral education, in other words, seems to work best in an environment where the community provides the authority for morality: “There is a body of evidence that



shows that moral education has its most enduring effects on young people when they inhabit a social world that coherently incarnates a moral culture defined by a clear and intelligible understanding of public and private good. In a milieu where the school, youth organizations, and the larger community share a moral culture that is integrated and mutually reinforcing; where the social networks of adult authority are strong, unified, and consistent in articulating moral ideals and their attending virtues; and where adults maintain a "caring watchfulness" over all aspects of a young person's maturation, moral education can be effective."<sup>14</sup>

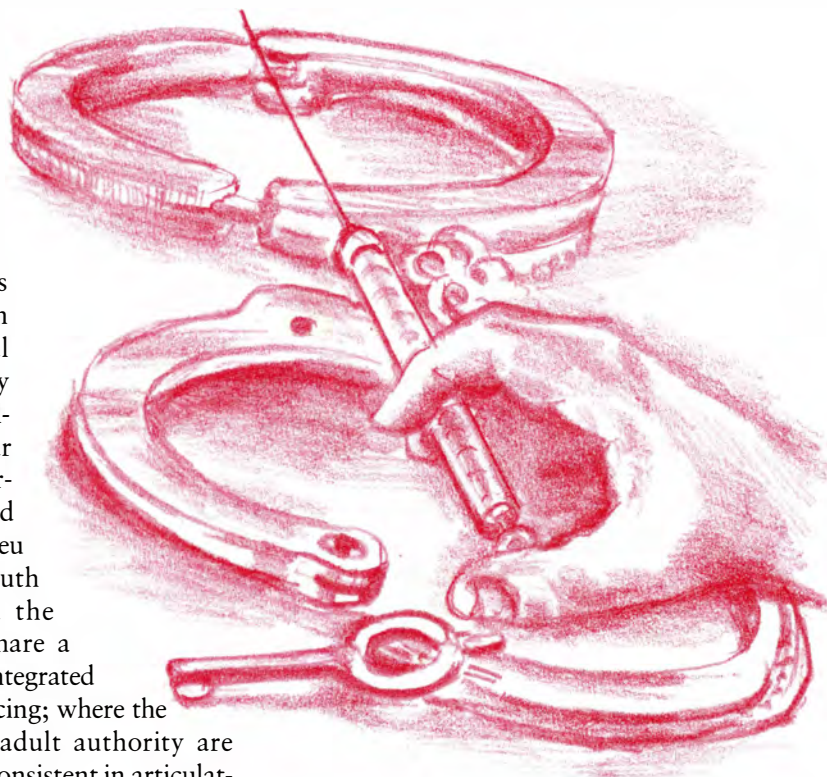
Yet, most character education programs carefully avoid religion altogether. An attempt was made in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to replace religion with moral philosophy as the foundation for ethics. "The goal of philosophical ethics for the last 200 years has been to find a rational basis for morality — on which, presumably, all reasonable people can agree. The attempt has fizzled," writes Daniel Taylor.<sup>15</sup>

Alasdair MacIntyre's brilliant analysis in *After Virtue* has shown, however, that people are not able to agree on what moral behavior is, much less construct a way to ensure that it happens in society. "The end result is that the only limits on the exercise of individual freedom are the requirements of positive law. Morality and law are conflated, indeed equated, so that what is not illegal is not immoral."<sup>16</sup> Arguing that the West is a culture "after virtue," MacIntyre argues that we use the same

moral words, but they have lost their meaning because they have become disconnected from an adequate foundation. The resulting dilemma is that, "all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference."<sup>17</sup>

### A normative community

Moral educators want to believe that the values and lists of virtues they espouse are so apparent they need no justification, so most don't concern themselves with the "Why?" questions. Without a foundation and without the "particularities", though, Hunter warns that the pursuit may be futile: "Thus when its advocates champion the 'Judeo-Christian ethic' — or what C.S. Lewis called 'the Tao' (the morality common to all cultures) — they champion an ethic that never existed in reality and now exists only as an ethical abstraction or political slogan."<sup>18</sup> The resulting morality is stripped of its meaning, significance and authority since it is a morality that has both feet firmly planted in thin air. "Without being anchored in any normative community, this morality retains little authority."<sup>19</sup>



Thomas Sergiovanni, however, has concluded that a certain type of school community, one which sounds very much like our CSI school, has the strong likelihood of fulfilling its educational goals. "A variety of evidence suggests that schools that function as well-focused communities where unique values are important, where caring for others is the norm, where academic matters count, and where social covenants bring parents, teachers, students, and others into a common commitment get surprisingly good results."<sup>20</sup>

### Qualitative research

In Christian education, of course, the moral education of children is rooted firmly in the authority of God's revealed Word. In our educational objectives, for example, we talk about students learning a biblical value system to assist them in decision-making. The question then becomes, as our astute evaluator asked, are we meeting those goals? The key for answering this question for us was qualitative research.

Most of such studies are set up to quantify the results. We all know how often nuances can escape the quantitative mesh. Qualitative research, on the other hand, allows the researcher himself to become the instrument of research and data collection by observing, analyzing, and interpreting the data that is gained from individual people. In quantitative research, the data is flat and thin; in qualitative research, the goal is collecting data that is rich and thick, often unique to the person, place, or situation. In this way it is more holistic.

The purpose of qualitative research is to get at underlying meanings and perceptions through interviews, focus groups, observa-

tions or other methods. In place of prediction (quantitative) is understanding (qualitative). Instead of asking “How?” or “What?,” qualitative research attempts to answer “Why?”

To assess the moral education of our school, I randomly selected 18 recent graduates and conducted a lengthy interview with each one, using questions that were created directly out of our mission, philosophy, and educational objectives. I recorded each interview, wrote a transcript of their responses, then divided the data into the eight categories of moral development described by Philip Jackson in *The Moral Life of Schools*, a qualitative research project conducted over a two-year period of time involving eighteen private, public, and parochial schools.<sup>161</sup> The results showed a profound level of character development. They had not only learned the biblical principles and values but were putting them into practice in their own lives.

This kind of qualitative research is possible for every school to complete, and the results will demonstrate whether our Christian schools are not only providing an excellent academic education, but also whether they are training up our covenant children in the wisdom of God. Cultivating Christian minds and character are at the heart of Christian education.

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# AN OLD DIAGRAM

by Bert Witvoet

Years ago, when I was a teacher at Toronto District Christian High School, we had the privilege of listening to a professor of the Free University of Amsterdam. The professor's name was Hans Rookmaker. His specialty was a Christian view of contemporary art and music. I remember the assembly very well. I also recall that many students were enthralled with his lecture. This man was able to talk about Jazz, the Beatles, Mahalia Jackson and many other popular singers and musicians. And he was able to talk about these people in a very sympathetic and knowledgeable way. He did not rave against popular artists. Nevertheless, he put them under the scrutiny of a Christian worldview.

It was a liberating and enlightening experience for all of us. What stood out for me and others was a diagram that he put on the overhead projector. The diagram was entitled a "Christian View of Reality." Throughout the years I have kept that diagram in a file, and I have reproduced it on this page of CEJ.

## Three realms

As you can see, Rookmaker divided reality into three realms: heaven, hell and earth. He pointed out that secularists or unbelievers tend to reduce reality to only one realm: Earth. Heaven and Hell don't exist for these people. God, angels, Satan and devils don't either. So unbelievers work with a reduced reality. And this makes for a reductionistic way of life. Unbelievers have shrunk reality into a self-contained box.

But Christians learn that reality is much bigger. The spiritual world is an inseparable part of reality and opens it up. And

so Christians apply spiritual principles and spiritual thinking to life.

When you look at the diagram you will see a cross that separates Hell from Heaven and the area called Rebellion from the area called Redemption. Notice that Rookmaker placed the word "Law" in the sidearms of the cross. Everything that lies under the

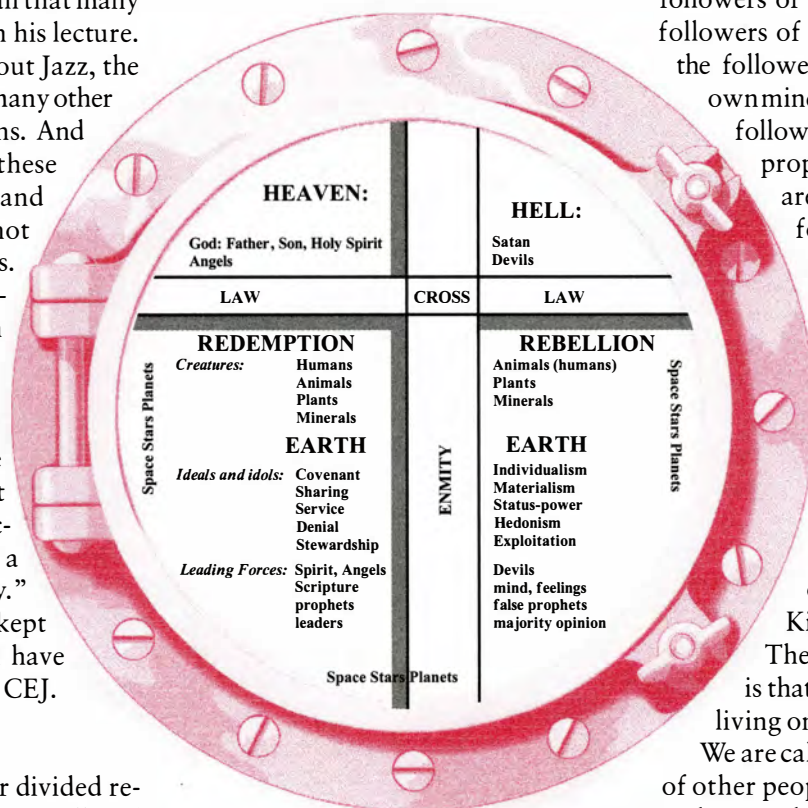
Humans are made in the image of God and are commanded to rule wisely over all the animals, plants and minerals.

## Direction givers

At the bottom of the circle you see the section called "Leading Forces." The followers of Christ are led by the Spirit; the followers of Satan are led by devils. The followers of Christ are led by Scripture; the followers of Satan are led by their own minds and their own feelings. The followers of Christ are led by godly prophets; the followers of Satan are led by false prophets. The followers of Christ are led by Christian leaders; the followers of Satan are led by majority opinion.

The section that lies just below the word "Earth" deals with the principles that give direction to our lives. It is here that we can test ourselves to see whether we follow the path of redemption, the way of the Kingdom, fully or only in part. The sad part about us Christians is that we often straddle the fence, living on both sides.

We are called to be stewards of our life, of other people and of animals, of plants and minerals. But look at our record as a human society throughout the ages. We have exploited people and used them as slaves, as sex objects, as a means to an end. We have ravaged the environment. We have scoured the bottoms of the ocean, littered our way through landscapes, and polluted water and air and soil. What is left of that beautiful mandate that God gave us at the beginning, when he told us to govern wisely and to look after this world as his stewards? ☹



arms of the cross, namely earth, space, stars and planets are under the law of God. They were created and are maintained by the will and word of God. Even those who are in rebellion are under the law are maintained by God's will.

What does the cross do? It redeems parts of that world under law and condemns the other part. Notice that on the side of rebellion humans are classified as animals. On the redemptive side humans are seen as separate from animals and above them.

## Jonathan Edwards meets Benjamin Franklin

These years have been good ones for students of American colonial history. John Adams, Alexander Hamilton, and Thomas Jefferson have received careful attention from biographers in the past decade. So have Lewis and Clark. If our students suffer from historical amnesia, it is not for lack of resources about our Founding Fathers.

And now, in the year 2003, another pair of important biographies appears on the list of best sellers. The publication of a much-needed new biography of Jonathan Edwards in this tercentenary year of his birth (1703-1758) is by itself a significant event — especially for religious educational communities. A life of Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) likewise demands attention.

And the roughly simultaneous appearance of these two biographies offers unusual opportunities for sober comparison and reflection. For these men represent two different paths in the woods. America has pretty much taken the direction of Franklin — the way of science and invention, of pragmatism, business, innovation, the way of the social pioneer and cosmopolitan man of the world. But not entirely.

In fact, some similarities jump out at us. Edwards, too, a complex man with broad interests, paid close attention to nature in a way typical of people in a world opening up to scientific empiricism. He, too, imbibed from writers such as Locke and Newton and Leibniz and their followers, men defining the Age of Reason. (Edwards, of course, employed Reason as well, but he used it against its proponents when he came to understand the humanistic basis for the new learning, replacing the traditional theological orientation of knowledge.) Both were ambiguous about slavery — and kept slaves. And Edwards also had a vision which embraced the world — though it was evangelism based on Reformation theology which nourished that vision rather than the one of nations engaged in peaceful commerce and amicable relationships. And both men lived lives of high drama.

Peering into the historical forest, one never loses sight entirely of either path. But Franklin's road shows more signs of traffic. We see his face, not Edwards's, on the face of a \$100 bill. More streets, schools, financial enterprises, and, of course, our political rhetoric and documents derive more from Franklin than from Edwards. More significantly, the energies which Franklin represents more accurately describe the dynamics of American activism than do Edwards' penetrating discourses on Freedom of the Will, Treatise on Religious Affections, and, yes, sermons such as

"Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" — unfortunately, the title for which he is best known, and, often, in a negative way.

George Marsden implies in his book, and observed at a presentation of the book, that our nation may have taken the wrong road. To be sure, not all Edwards' emphases are equally attractive — his typically Puritan millennial views, for example, based on the notion that America was "a city on a hill" — a beacon that was to lead the world in evangelism and, thus, bring in the Kingdom. His diatribes against any religion other than Reformation Calvinism seem strange. His Constantinian sense of the relationship between church and state has been drastically modified.

And some stereotypes are all too accurate: a devoted husband and father and warm friend to those close to him, but an authoritarian personality in his ecclesiastical and educational relationships. It was for these traits that he was asked to leave his parish in Northampton after 22 years of tireless efforts to bring his congregation to maturity. Having

George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003. Pp. 505 plus 110 pages of appendices, end notes, credits, and index. Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003. Pp. 590. Reviewed by Steve J. Van Der Weele, professor of English (retired), Calvin College

said that, one needs to consider carefully one of Marsden's opening statements: "If there is an emphasis that appears difficult, or harsh, or overstated in Edwards, often the reader can better appreciate his perspective by asking the question: 'How would this issue look if it really were the case that bliss or punishment for a literal eternity was at stake?'" (p. 5)

Viewed in this light, Edwards' theological formulations become intensely practical for education and life: the ineffable, intra-Trinitarian relationships of a loving God, a love expressed in a creation which explodes with God's glory; the deep concern for the sovereignty of God in the history of mankind — especially in the history of redemption; the compelling drive to persuade us how nothing in all creation has meaning apart from its Creator; and an appreciation for the deep intuition that all things do indeed cohere in the person of Jesus Christ. Marsden's concluding paragraph (p. 505) summarizes all this in modern idiom.

Those who catch a vision of God's love will be enthralled by it and will seek to reflect that love in their own sacrificial love towards the undeserving. "They will be drawn from their self-centered universes. Seeing the beauty of the redemptive love of Christ as the true center of reality, they will love God and all that he has created." The title of this chapter, fitting in itself, also goes some way in defining the different world views of Franklin and Edwards: the transitory and the enduring. And this contrast has everything to do with education. ☪



## Short Reviews



Steve J. Van Der Weele  
svweele@calvin.edu

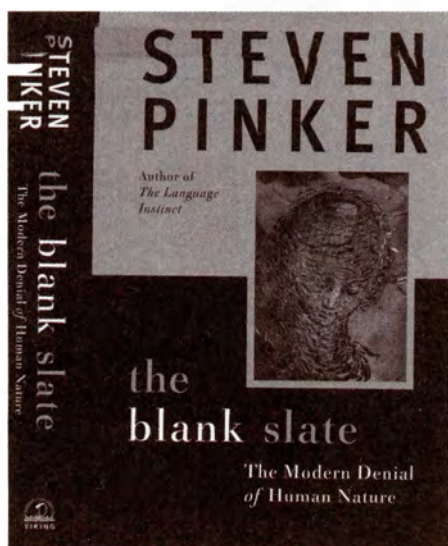
**Michael Gurian and Patricia Henley, *Boys and Girls Learn Differently*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001. 314 pages + 30 pages of appendices, index.**

As their contribution to the enormous educational challenges of our day, these authors have delved into fifteen years of research about the brain, hormones, and gender, together with the relevance of these findings for education. They strongly contest past assumptions that the genders are virtually interchangeable, that the differences between boys and girls result from society's expectations. The research demonstrates such profound differences that a case can easily be made for separate, gender-based schools. Such an understanding will have increasingly to become part of a teacher's preparation.

The authors supply numerous examples and case histories to illustrate how bonding and trust develop differently in boys and girls — what works and what doesn't. For children with behavioral disorders, drugs may help in the short run, but they also interfere with normal development of the brain. The authors project their discourse, in part, against the background of the social pathology of our time.

**Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*. New York: Viking Press, 2002. 434 pages + 75 pages of appendices, notes, and index.**

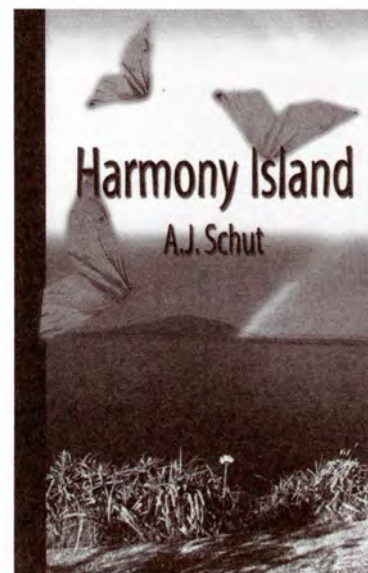
This book, a best seller by an MIT professor of psychology, reports that we need a new paradigm for defining human nature and that we need to work out the implications of this new understanding for education, human behavior, political life, morality, gender, and crime and other social problems. The old model was based on John Locke's "blank slate" formulation. He had said that children come into the world, not with a genetic inheritance of innate ideas and predispositions, but with a mind "as white paper void of all characters, without any ideas." How, then, do we explain the content of our minds?



Through one word — experience. Pinker wishes, up to a point, to reinstate the older view — Platonic and Augustinian — that human nature is inherited. John Locke's theories, regarding the mind as malleable matter, have done enough harm. We need to heed the astounding recent discoveries of the biological sciences — neurobiology, cognitive neuroscience, behavioral genetics. These studies prove that we are "hardwired" for language, cooperation, community, emotions, altruism. And they disprove the Lockean formulation that gender differences are prompted by social expectations rather than being inherent. (See Gurian, above). If the enemy of my enemy is my friend, then Pinker becomes our ally. But what a disappointment to discover that alongside his corrections he brings with him his own retinue of errors. He now exposes what to him is still another fallacy — "the Ghost in the Machine" — the notion of a soul separate from the body, an autonomous presiding will that both uses the brain but is not wholly determined by it. The brain, marvelous organ that it is, with its awesome complexities, is a gift from the force of Evolution. It is Evolution which, over the centuries, has given us our moral categories (including altruism), our humanness, and even the meaning of life — and, by the way, the here and now is the only one we have or need. As is so often true, Christianity, rightly exercised, needs to come to the rescue to make sense out of nonsense. Only the full weight of a Christian anthropology, which speaks, in biblical terms, of "eternity in the heart of man," can refute a view that everything we attribute to a Creator who created a purposeful world comes to us by randomness and accident. Thus, it is right to say that the book is, finally, not about science, but about to which God we will give allegiance.

**A. J. Schut, *Harmony Island*. Baltimore: Publish America. 176 pages.**

Mr. Schut, Writing Instructor at Western Michigan High School, Muskegon, has given us a fast-paced, delightfully inventive fantasy novel about two colonies in a cold war with each other because of mutual misunderstandings and age-old lies. More open warfare begins when Julip, a young Flighter,



and her parents (these are bird-characters) encounter a storm which forces them to land in the domain of the enemy — the dreaded Burrowers. The Burrowers have a problem: Are they obliged to heed Julip's plea for help, or is she a spy? Now the adventures begin — a roller-coaster series of them, with the good but vulnerable characters in mortal combat with evil characters so sinister, so skilled in deception, so much servants of the Evil One, that we wonder whether the Truth has any chance of survival. Since these are birds, the novel can cover a vast topography — over (and inside) mountains, deserts, lakes. Julip is at the center of the action — the kidnappings, the trial for treason, the aid she insists on extending to the enemy, her discovery of the truth about the poisoned lakes. Theologically, we witness kingdoms and principalities warring with each other, enemies becoming reconciled, and servants of the Good One — from both camps — invited to the new island, their proper destination, their true home. The novel has a nodding acquaintance with all your favorite romances — *Book of the Dun Cow*, *Perelandra*, the *Narnia Tales*, *Lord of the Rings* — with even, perhaps, a wink at *The Matrix Reloaded*. Once you get yourself to suspend disbelief about the birds as characters, things fall deftly into place.

Cornelius G. Hunter, *Darwin's God: Evolution and the Problem of Evil*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House (Brazos Press), 2001. 175 pages plus notes and index.

The battle between Darwinians and supernaturalists continues. A recent example is that of a biology professor, Michael Dini, of Texas Tech University, who has made it a requirement that a student needs to affirm his belief in evolution to receive the professor's recommendation to law school. Though the case is in limbo because the student dropped the course, the professor received editorial support for the right to impose such a standard.

Cornelius Hunter, a molecular biophysicist, has provided a new slant on the issue. He contends that Darwin came to believe in random selection, unguided natural forces as the driving force behind biological processes, by default rather than by solid science. In their observations, Darwin and his followers, too observant as naturalists to believe in the romantic view of nature as an ordered, coherent, near-perfect world, focussed on

“the clumsy, wasteful, blundering, low and horribly cruel works of nature.” (140) What God would have created a wasp whose larva grows inside a caterpillar and eats his victim from the inside out? Who would have created 256,000 varieties of beetles? “God would not have done it this way,” they insist. Even the eye, frequently presented as evidence of design, is judged to be the work of a tinkerer, a second-class engineer who needs to upgrade his skills. The habit of mind which distances God “from the apparent failings of his creation” (126) had been developing for the previous two centuries. Hunter devotes a substantial part of his book to this history. Beginning with Descartes, the pattern of thought was to progressively banish God from his creation. He and others did this in terms of physics and biology, but also in a moral sense, ostensibly to avoid making God the author of evil. A Christian anthropology, of course, needs to address these questions. But, as Hunter convincingly shows, the claims supporting evolution do not hold up — whether it is the record of fossils, or the supposed classical case of the evolution of the horse, or the abruptness with which variations appear, in contradiction to the theory which needs gradual development, or the failure of new species to make their appearance.

Evolution is atheism developed as protest. It is a default theology. Hunter contends, therefore, that Darwin's work (and much of it remains useful) is a mixture of metaphysics and science — that his book is, ultimately, about God, rather than science. 