

A forum for Christian school educators

Christian Educators Journal

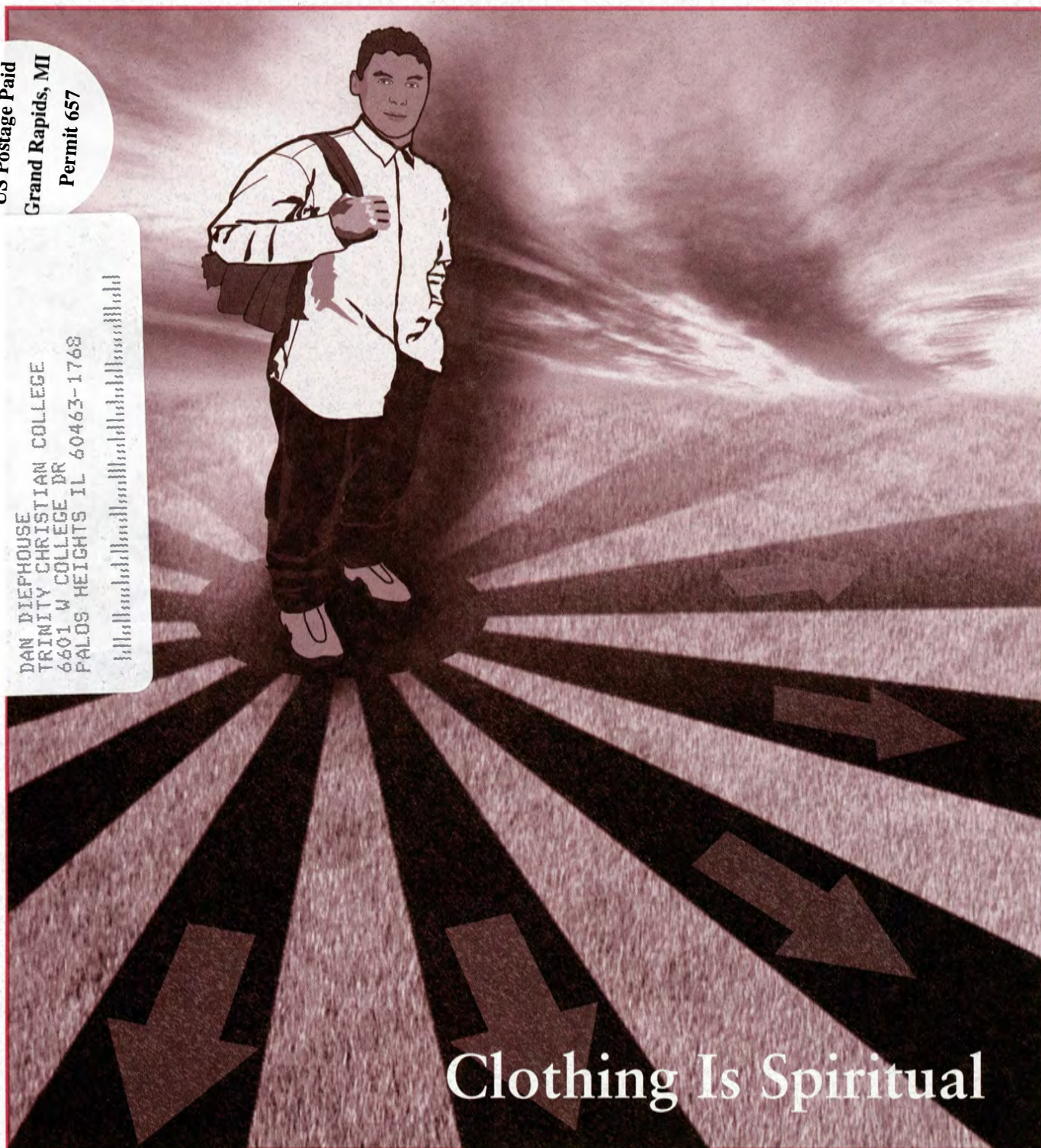
Volume 43 No. 4 April 2004



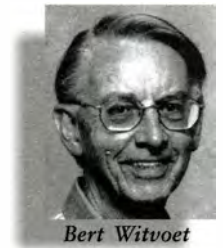
Non Profit Org.
US Postage Paid
Grand Rapids, MI
Permit 657

469 4 12/2099 1

DAN DIEPHOUSE
TRINITY CHRISTIAN COLLEGE
6601 W COLLEGE DR
PALOS HEIGHTS IL 60463-1768



Clothing Is Spiritual



Bert Witvoet

Integrity and Love at Closing Ceremonies

Permit me to utter some random thoughts on valedictory addresses. You will find other writings dealing with these matters in this issue.

Valedictory addresses are goodbye speeches. As such, any farewell oration, like a funeral oration or a speech for a retiring teacher, can be considered a valedictory address. Of course, most of us restrict the usage of this term to graduation speeches, particularly the ones given by student valedictorians.

But at the same time that we speak of saying farewell at graduation exercises, we call them commencement exercises because graduations are the beginning of a new phase of life. But then, funeral services are also commencements, as are retirement dinners. Salvation Army people refer to the passing away of a Christian soldier as a promotion to glory. Properly speaking, any change in the life of a Christian should be a forward-looking affair.

In the context of education, the end of a school year is a time of forward-looking events that mark both an end and a beginning. It is a time usually marked by graduation ceremonies and, sometimes, retirement celebrations. They are both closing events, though of a nature very different from each other. A graduation comes at the beginning of a career or additional studies; retirement, at the end. Retirement is exactly what it says it is: a withdrawal from the work-a-day world with all its opportunities and monetary rewards. There is a certain amount of freedom in, that, but it's also a mark of being sidelined, or, as some put it crudely, put out to pasture. Some rage against dispensability; others embrace the escape from scrutiny and external expectations. It never ceases to amaze me how many younger workers are envious of those who retire. What's so exciting about going downhill unless you're a snowboarder?

Flowery language

Now, graduations are something else. They are full of hope and promise. Here row upon row of fresh-looking faces beam confidence and celebration. Nice words are being said, and a formal diploma is handed out with much pomp and circumstance. Sometimes funny things are said to break the pomp. A certain Gary Bolding once told a group of graduates: "Your families are extremely proud of you. You can't imagine the sense of relief they are experiencing. This would be a most opportune time to ask for money." According to Theodore Roosevelt, "A man who has never gone to school may steal from a freight car; but if he has a university education, he may steal the whole railroad." (News stories about Enron, Parmalat *et al* make that declaration sound prophetic.)

Not all graduation or retirement ceremonies are noble or honest events. Sometimes we rely on flowery language to cover up some much-needed honesty

about the school, the students or the teachers. But, then, at an unexpected moment, the sun of truth shines through. Consider the valedictory speech given by an Ontario student a year ago at his high school's graduation ceremony.

Andrew Ironside had been selected by his peers to be that year's valedictorian. It wasn't that Andrew had been a popular figure. (Actually, he was considered a bit of a nerd because he and his friends spent more time in the science lab and the library than on the sports field or the social circuit.) No, his peers had chosen him so they could make him the butt of a practical joke. Certain students wanted to embarrass him, and others went along for the ride. They didn't think he would go through with it.

"A lot of people in our grade, the grade that selected me, do not know my name," wrote Andrew in a note which the principal got hold of. "I am not the most popular person, not even close. I am not on the sports teams. I am not on Student Council. If I can be elected, anything is possible." The principal, who had heard disturbing rumors that the valedictorian that year had been chosen as a joke, called Andrew into his office days before the ceremony and asked if he was going to make a mockery of the whole thing. He wanted to make sure Andrew understood the responsibility of representing the graduating students well. They discussed the content of the speech Andrew was to give.

Moment of truth

Come the evening of the graduation ceremony, Andrew was introduced by a young man he had chosen himself — a popular athlete in his class. "I'm pretty happy to say I've spent time with almost all of you," said the good-looking young man. "Sadly to say, Andrew is not really included in this group of people. The truth is, I barely know him." He then continued to explain that Andrew "was probably the most unlikely person to be nominated, let alone actually win." Everyone laughed at what one teacher described as a "malicious introduction."

Then it was Andrew's turn. He said a few complimentary words about the school, but he had difficulty reading his paper. Suddenly he crumpled his prepared speech and let go of his true feelings. "A lot of you were jerks," he informed his classmates. He explained that at first he thought it was funny he had been chosen, but it was impossible for him to pretend that high school "had been an endless stream of fond memories." He said that it was "the cliques and the negative attitudes of his classmates that would define their legacy." He concluded by saying that he would

probably never see any of them again.

In the eyes of the principal, it had not been a true valedictory address, but it had been “personally cathartic for Mr. Ironside.” When members of his staff afterwards asked him to change the way a valedictorian is chosen, the principal, much to his credit, refused. Valedictorians must represent the persona of students, not the teachers, he commented.

It is doubtful that Andrew’s former classmates will ever forget their graduation. It is to be hoped that some of them will, upon reflection, feel shame and regret. If the “cathartic” speech accomplished that much, it exceeds many valedictorian addresses in usefulness.

No sedatives, please!

Speaking the truth in love is something we Christians should

certainly strive for, also at graduation ceremonies and retirement events. These events may not necessarily be the best forum for finding fault with a school or the people in it, but they should not be turned into public relations events either. A bit of truth serum goes a long way to bring integrity to our celebrations.

Of course, it’s better to make sure that the school experience is a positive one for both students and teachers. The challenge for Christian schools is to create positive learning environments, places where teachers and students give and receive respect. That way a valedictory address given to a departing teacher or to a class of graduates can be an honest appreciation of how God works truth and love into the lives of all.

Most commencement addresses are rather boring and predictable, eliciting the comment from cartoon writer Garry Trudeau that “commencement speeches were invented largely in the belief that college students should never be released into the world until they have been properly sedated.” I once jokingly suggested to a group that they could safely shake the hands of a celebrant and mutter some thing like “My mother passed away.” Nobody would notice.

What Gary Trudeau suggested, however, cannot be said of the commencement address given by Roy Berkenbosch to a graduating class at Edmonton Christian High School in Edmonton, Alberta, last year June (please see p. 12 of this issue). I doubt that any of the students and the parents felt they had been sedated. According to Berkenbosch, “the best things you learned weren’t written in books,/ As if life was a recipe and you were just cooks. / No, the best lessons learned were more subtle and lasting,/ About living and loving, not failing and passing.”

With that advice ringing in our ears we say “Vale” to all the departing students and teachers. God go with you!

Bert Witvoet

Note to Our Advertisers

Please make sure that all camera-ready ads are e-mailed as PDF files to the editor before the following due dates:

October Issue — August 15
December Issue — October 15
February Issue — December 15
April Issue — February 15

Christian Educators Journal

Published four times a year:
October, December, February, April

Reprint Policy:

We allow free reprinting or photocopying of individual articles that have appeared in our journal, as long as the copied articles are used within the context of schooling and the source is acknowledged.

Managing Editor: Bert Witvoet
Design Editor: Doug Roorda
Manuscript Editor: Nelly Westerhoff
Production Editor: Alice R. Oldejans
Advertising Manager: Don Oppewal
Business Manager: James Rauwerda

Board of Trustees:

| | |
|--|--|
| <i>Calvin College</i> | <i>Dordt College</i> |
| Ron Sjoerdsma (chairperson) | Lorna Van Gilst |
| Jim Rooks | <i>Institute for Christian Studies</i> |
| <i>Trinity Christian College</i> | Harry Fernhout |
| Dan Diephouse (secretary) | <i>The King's University College</i> |
| <i>Christian Educators Association</i> | Robert Bruinsma |
| William Boerman-Cornell | <i>Ontario Christian Teachers Association</i> |
| Lois De Vries | May Drost |
| Rebecca Furlong | <i>Redeemer University College</i> |
| Judy Henson | Dirk Windhorst |
| Barbara Hoekema | <i>Christian Teachers Association British Columbia</i> |
| Lois Smits | <i>Denver Christian School Association</i> |
| <i>Covenant College</i> | <i>Northwest Christian Schools International</i> |
| Stephen Kaufmann | <i>SW Christian Teachers Association</i> |
| | <i>SW Minnesota Christian Teachers Association</i> |

Regional Editors:

Robert Bruinsma - Western Canada
Agnes Fisher - Eastern US
Sean Schat - Eastern Canada
Myrtle Smits - Southwestern US



Do Our High Schools Promote Spiritual Maturity?

by Jim Dekker

Jim Dekker is assistant professor of youth ministry and co-director for the Center for Youth Ministry Studies (CYMS) at North Park University, Chicago, Illinois. He served as an elder in Faith Reformed Church, South Holland, Illinois, taught high school Bible for 8 years, and participated in the OACS Bible Curriculum project in the 90s.

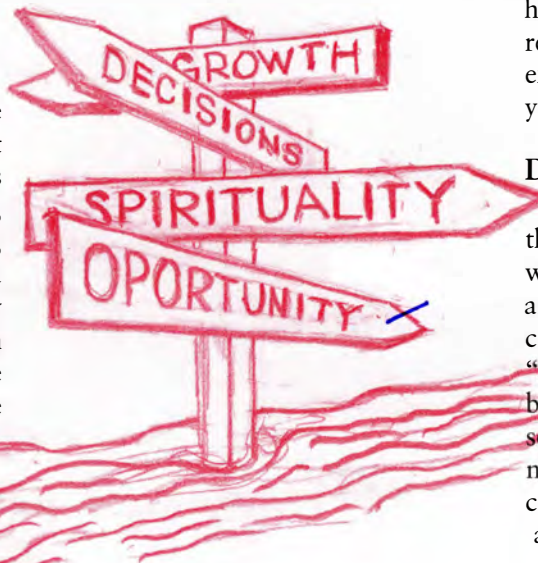
The Christian high school provides a safe microcosm of learning, at least, in its finest hour. In this microcosm, students experience a variety of relationships, thoughtful challenges in various disciplines, opportunities in athletics, fine arts, and other co-curricular activities; and they become more aware of how the Christian worldview engages culture. As vital as these experiences are, how can we assure ourselves that these students are also maturing spiritually?

When we think of our spiritual lives as adults, we often think of the many decisions we make from day to day — decisions that move us toward, or away from, obedience to Christ. If we understand spirituality to mean being responsible agents (decision makers) in the Kingdom of God, our schools are hotbeds of spiritual decision-making opportunities. If spiritual maturity is being able to discern valuable choices in the various contexts in which we find ourselves, our students are more than able to begin such a learning process in our schools.

Crazy period

As many of us know, teens are living in a developmental period where they are neither children nor adults but in some kind of “middle ground” or “muck” called Adolescence. This period of time creates a shifting-sand feeling while making life’s decisions: “Will I stay childish and play it

safe or will I move into new areas of responsibility?” Young people in this stage will often make decisions to do something for a very particular reason, only to wake up the next day with a very different reason floating around in their heads and a nervous desire to change their mind.



Since, as children, they lived with the notion that most decisions are either right or wrong, oftentimes their perspective (in the moment) is considered “right” until another idea floats by. Then the previous notion becomes “wrong” and the new idea “right.” As a result, they have difficulty with longer term commitments and an inability to get beyond particular mindsets that seem safe or “right.” This battle of “black and white” makes the adolescent feel quite crazy (along with other battles they encounter) but in fact they are simply struggling over how to appreciate degrees of right and wrong and how to stick to the decisions they made.

In light of our above notion of spirituality and decision making, we may quickly judge students to be lacking in spirituality, but to do so would be unwise. To me, it seems

wiser to consider this time as a period of maturing, when opportunities abound for teachers to channel transforming grace into the lives of youth. Our task as a Christian educational community is to walk with young people as they sort out this struggle via various disciplines and school experiences. And our schools ought to help students make these decisions, recognizing them to be conscious spiritual exercises which entail responsibilities and yield appropriate results.

Decision opportunities

The high school environment requires that students make a variety of choices for which they are held responsible. Students are able to engage in sports, arts, and other co-curricular activities that are neither “good versus bad” but offer a range of benefits and challenges that need to be sorted through. The decision whether or not to participate brings with it commitments and responsibilities for an appropriate duration. Students are also given the people and places to help work through their reasons and fears when making those decisions.

Our schools are also environments where students make both good and bad decisions. Teachers will communicate that attending class and paying attention is simply a good decision or discipline — a spiritual responsibility. At the same time, teachers will vary their teaching style to appreciate the diversity for which God created students so that the teachers’ decisions and discipline are pedagogically reasonable. Students don’t have to become something they are not, but they do need to engage in the responsibility to learn. Therefore, going to class and engaging in the classroom experience are good spiritual decisions.

Unfortunately, as I told my students, teachers cannot manipulate their wills and compel them to learn. Teaching and

learning are cooperative *meetings of the wills* of both students and teachers and, within the scope of God's sovereignty, students maintain the power to engage in learning or not. Our task as teachers is to recognize that the students' engagement is a process of spiritual discipline. Our challenge is to move them from passivity to full engagement so that their lives become enriched not only by the topics learned but by the development of spiritually wise decisions.

Teachers are there not only to create an environment where students make good decisions, they must also reflect the implications and responsibilities that such decisions incur. Our students need to recognize that success is more than gaining the grade. If we believe that students are whole beings participating in the Kingdom, then our responsibility to teach goes beyond the mastery of propositions. Our classroom is the milieu for spiritual discipline as well. An "A" may represent the mastery of propositions but it is the relationship of respect fostered between the teacher and student that will communicate support for the student's spiritual growth.

Reasonable implications

As we all know, students have the options of making bad decisions. They may come to class and mentally disengage from the learning experience. Appropriate implications ought to follow. Our schools struggle to define proportionate penalties because they seek to nurture an awareness of degrees of implications. Without this discipline, the students' moral and spiritual growth will be frustrated. For students to grow in their understanding of proportionate responses, they need to be disciplined (disciplined) by real and reasonable implications.

In the current adolescent world, implications for poor decisions are far from

reasonable. Often students who have patterned misbehavior live in a family system where discipline is inconsistent. Their definition of good and bad decisions became fuzzy and, consequently, the path of spiritual growth becomes a wandering in the fog. Their moral foundations were shaken so that when they now face the complexity of adolescence, they are unable to navigate "gray" areas.

Schools that enforce consistent and proportionate action for misbehavior may find themselves confusing such young people. These students may respond in a host of odd ways, but, regardless of how they respond, the school that remains consistent will be in the business of forming spiritual growth. If the school's disciplinary process becomes less consistent, it affirms a more foggy spirituality. Having said this, I am not advocating harsh legalism, insensitivity to mitigating circumstances and lacking awareness of the power of grace. Nor should the discipline process circumvent review. On the contrary, as it is in reality, the discipline process ought always to be under refinement for the sake of furthering spiritual discipleship rather than another agenda.

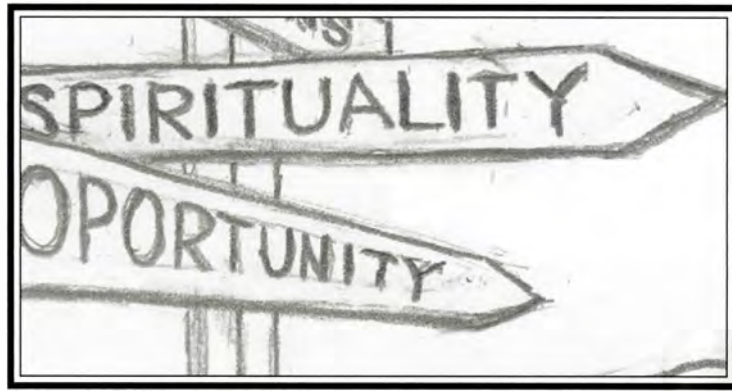
At this point you may get the impression that I have said nothing new. We do these things already, you say. To some extent you are right. But my question is, Do we realize that in all our routine tasks we are influencing the spiritual well-being of our students? How often are we aware that the way we teach influences the spiritual discipline of students to respect not only their teachers, but also topics, knowledge, and their futures? How often do we make disciplinary decisions without realizing that we are teaching a spiritual lesson about God, justice and grace — that the event is an opportunity for the student's spiritual growth?

Call to study

I remember conversations with fellow faculty members, both in Chicago and in Ontario, Canada, during which we sought ways to convince students that being a student is a call of God and that they must reflect that call as they make decisions in school. We asked, "How might we effectively communicate to our students that their place right now *as students* is the very place God has for them, and that their decisions in that role are to honor God?" This emphasis, indeed, needs to be a constant discussion and ought to remain on the forefront of our engagement with students as spiritual beings.

As a co-director for the Center for Youth Ministry Studies at North Park University, I regularly pay attention to youth culture as it shifts with the forces of technology, communications, sub-cultures, family systems and the like. A common mood among youth is a lack of "purpose," or the lack of personal significance within their present context. Such a mood comes from feeling anonymous, like a single leaf in miles of forest (or, for you techies, a digit on a hard drive of binary code). Young people these days will not naturally feel as if they have a significant role to play in the massive society around them, let alone in a kingdom that an all-powerful God has designed.

A second benefit from working at the Center is that I am no longer within the high school system but am able to see more objectively what takes place there. Such a view has given me an incredible appreciation for what society has in CSI schools. Given many factors within the CSI high schools, one realizes the power you have to instill purpose and significance into the lives of students. The faculty conversations that instill this awareness and decisions will have a powerful effect on their perception of their place in the



Kingdom of God even though a sense of anonymity continues to numb youth culture today.

Self and community

Essential for our spiritual growth is a double knowledge that Calvin identifies in the first paragraphs of *The Institutes*. The double knowledge is the dynamic of learning more about our self and others as we learn more about God. As both kinds of knowledge develop side by side, this dynamic creates a growth in spiritual maturity.

While our students are taking Bible classes and learning about God through our general curriculum, they are faced with many opportunities to explore how they see themselves within different aspects of the Kingdom. Clubs, athletics, music and other extra-curricular activities provide opportunities for the student to begin working within particular groups (communities) and making decisions based on how they see themselves as uniquely gifted participants. This opportunity imparts a sense of self-knowledge and an awareness of others in the Body of Christ necessary for spiritual growth.

An added benefit our schools provide is the support students receive from spiritually mature faculty and administrators that help them interpret these decisions well and reflect back to the student how they are fitting in. A coach who observes a good decision (a fine athlete joining the appropriate team) ought to take the opportunity to blend into that self-knowledge an appropriate humility and sense of interdependence. The coach essentially helps students develop an awareness of their place in a community (team). If the coach permits for self-centeredness or individualism to develop, we recognize that not only as poor coaching but also as a lost opportunity to

shape the spiritual growth of a student. If we take Calvin's ideas seriously, such a lost opportunity also affects the student's understanding of God.

New opportunities

There may be times when a "prize" player may choose to explore his or her abilities in another activity rather than in a sport. In such situations, our schools have the fundamental responsibility to support that spiritual exploration, never mind the stats of a team. If a student is robbed of such an exploration in their high school years, how will she in the future move into new opportunities with confidence and the strength of past experiences? How willing will he be able to follow God's call to a new vocation or a new responsibility in the church if we have trained him to stay within a particular gifting?

I remember several coaching experiences when young people thought they were better than they really were. Almost invariably, through circumstances or through coaching, God moved this misunderstanding into something more truthful. After the seasons ended, those students were more spiritually minded about self, others and God.

As a high school Bible teacher for eight years, I was able to engage students in a wide variety of ways. I enjoyed challenging students in class by asking them to see God for who he is in new and fresh ways. I have also received from students the privilege of walking with them in their life's decisions. I value them as more than just students but as Image Bearers, treating their concerns seriously and with an eye for God's work in their lives. These relationships remain long after the students


have graduated, married, and became parents. I participated in their

spiritual growth as a teacher but also as a fellow change agent in the Kingdom of God. As faculty, we need to realize that we are doing more than communicating content in interesting ways. We are intentionally participating in the spiritual growth of the young people in our schools.

Students will move toward some form of spirituality as they make decisions that develop a sense of themselves, others and God. But do we believe that our daily task of teaching is an intentional discipleship process? As students enter our school environment, will we make deliberate contributions to their spiritual development, or will we just teach content and passively sit back as critical spectators of their decision-making processes?

I believe that CSI schools have incredible opportunities to foster spiritual maturity in the lives of their students. If teachers and administrators understand their tasks as engaging students spiritually as well as academically, athletically, musically, our schools will fulfill their mandate to educate students for Kingdom responsibility.

Reference:

1. Western cultures are the only cultures in the world that do not have a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood whereby young people are able to understand themselves as either adults or children and then bear responsibility accordingly. Current research is now finding that the period of "adolescence" is stretching past the previously understood 18 years of age to at least 25 years. See *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood* by Jeffrey Jensen Arnett. Prentice Hall, NJ. 2001. 

Clothing Is Spiritual:

by Peter Jonker

Peter Jonker is pastor at Woodlawn Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. This article is based on a workshop he gave at the Christian Educators Association convention last year.

My grandmother met Sunday morning with a lint brush and a can of shoe polish. Actually she met Saturday night with the brush and the polish, but the fruit of her labor was on display on Sunday morning in the First Christian Reformed Church of Brampton, Ontario. Grandma made sure that the Westerhoff family showed up to worship in their Sunday best. My grandmother would probably never have thought of her Saturday night lint and polish detail this way, but her actions (and the actions of millions of people like her) show us that she understood the spirituality of clothing. At some level, Grandma knew clothing was a spiritual thing.

What Grandma made implicit 50 years ago, modern advertisers make explicit today. They understand that our use of clothing extends far beyond the practical. They understand that people use dress as a form of self-expression. People make statements with their clothes. People feel uplifted when they are wearing a new outfit. Advertisers know that what we pull out of the closet and choose to put on in the morning is an expression of our values, our feelings, our intentions for the day.

The Spirit of apparel

For example, in the town where I live, a local clothing retailer had an advertising campaign a couple of years ago that revolved around the slogan: "Apparel Therapy." The words "Apparel Therapy" would appear on their billboards beside a picture of a happy-looking model in attractive clothing. The message implied

is that if you are down, if you are blue, you can find healing in a new suit, a new blouse. Why spend all that money on Prozac when all you really need are new pants!?

Last year, an issue of *Time* magazine had an article about the success of the clothing store Pacific Sunwear. The title of the article was "Selling Teen Spirit" (emphasis mine). The success of this company was attributed to the fact that it is not simply selling kids individual articles of clothing; they are selling them a whole lifestyle, a whole look, a whole Spirit — in this case the laid back Spirit of the California surfer Spirituality. (I purposely capitalize "Spirit" and "Spirituality" in various places to connect with the powers of darkness that lie behind modern trends.) Teenagers from Saskatchewan and Nebraska want to look like surfers, and PacSun helps kids "look as if they spend the day with sand between their toes."

Clothing is Spiritual. As anthropologist and fashion writer Alison Lurie has written: Clothing confirms *identity*. "The sharing of clothes is always a strong indication of shared tastes, opinions and even personality. Next time you are at a large party, meeting or public event, look around the room and ask yourself if there is anyone present whose clothes you would be willing to wear yourself on that occasion. If so, he or she is apt to be a *soulmate*."

Clothing is Spiritual. Maybe we're not used to thinking in those terms, but, under the tutelage of advertisers, our kids are getting used to it. They understand the spiritual meaning of clothes, they understand the spiritual language of clothes; in fact, they speak the language fluently.

Biblical confirmation

The spirituality of clothing isn't something invented by our culture; it's something that you see in the Bible as well.

The Bible has quite a lot to say about the spiritual function of clothes. There are several passages where we are warned against excessive vanity in our dress. 1 Corinthians 11:2-14 and 1 Peter 3:3-5 both warn us against flaunting our dress and sending inappropriate messages with our outfits. In addition, Matthew 6:25-29 famously instructs us: "Do not worry about your life ... about your body, what you shall wear. Is not the body more important than clothes? Look at the lilies of the field. They do not labor or spin, yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was clothed like one of these." It's passages like these that gave rise to the sartorial restraint of the Amish and the Mennonites and the monastic orders.

But the Bible offers more than these warnings. The Bible also celebrates beautiful clothes that are *appropriately* beautiful. In Exodus 39 the craftspeople who made the garments for the tabernacle priests were instructed to make vestments rich in color and detail. The priests were to look good. In Proverbs 31, among the many virtues attributed to the worthy woman is this one: "When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all are clothed in scarlet. She makes bed coverings for her bed; she is clothed in fine linen and purple."

And maybe most compelling of all is the Bible's repeated celebration of creation's beauty. When God made the world, he didn't make it black and white and plain; he made it beautiful. He clothed creation in extravagant color and rich detail. He used all sorts of colors, textures and designs, and this beauty "declares the glory of God" (Psalm 19).

In addition to these passages, there are many others where clothing communicates. Sometimes the references are metaphorical (Ephesians 4:22-23, Colossians 3:9-10, Ephesians 6:10ff, Revelation 19, Luke

Just Ask Advertisers!

15:22, Matthew 22:11-12). Sometimes the references are direct (Jonah 3:6-8, Genesis 37-42 (clothes are a huge theme in the Joseph stories), Genesis 3, Daniel 5:29, I Samuel 18:4, II Kings 2:7-14).

But in the end the Bible clearly understands that clothing is spiritual. The Bible allows for us to dress attractively, the Bible allows us to use texture, color and design in our dress, but the Bible wants us to be careful about the messages our clothes send. If clothing is a kind of spiritual language, the Bible wants to make sure that we tame the sartorial tongue.

Deceptively conservative

If clothing is spiritual, and the Bible is interested in the way we express ourselves through our clothes, let's turn to an example of inappropriate clothing spirituality that is currently finding wide expression in our schools. The retail clothing giant Abercrombie and Fitch continues to be one of the most popular clothiers for North American children. At a recent conference I asked a group of teachers and administrators how many of them regularly saw Abercrombie clothes in their schools. All the high school and middle school educators said the clothing was prevalent. Many of the teachers said they saw the clothes even in the lower elementary grades.

Abercrombie and Fitch represents a distinct and intentional clothing. What sort of Spirit are they trying to celebrate and embody? A Spirit of bored, rich, beautiful prep school kids who like to have lots of casual sex. The prep school Spirit comes

from the cut of the clothes. They are deceptively conservative in cut, looking like leftovers from some New England private school. The aura of boredom comes from the fact that the clothes all have that worn, world-weary look. They are carefully tattered. The Spirit of wealth is embodied in the cost of the clothes. A pair of ripped



jeans (called 'Destroyed Chuggers') runs a mere \$98.00 in their 2003 back-to-school catalogue.

The Spirit of free sex is the most blatant Spirit of all. Their stores feature black and white pictures of naked models (carefully angled to cover the naughty bits), their web site features pictures of young people involved in threesomes, and their quarterly magazine features pictures of naked young people in scenes meant to look like orgies and articles on how to be an amateur porn star. The following quotation is a lead-in

to their back-to-school issue: "Back to School thus means: forget the stupid spontaneous pleasures of summer sports, of reading books, watching movies and listening to music. Pull yourself together and learn sex." Subtle they're not.

Whether they know it or not (and, unfortunately, many of them do), when our kids put on a nice conservative sweatshirt with the words "Abercrombie" splashed across their chest, this is the Spirit they are advertising, this is the Spirit they are promoting. Promotion starts young. There is a whole line of Abercrombie children's clothes in the mall. You can indoctrinate your five-year-old in the Spirit of free sex.

Revisit uniforms?

All this raises new questions about the way educators approach dress codes. Traditional dress codes have rules about profanity on clothing, width of shoulder straps, length of skirts, and (especially these days) belly button visibility. Unfortunately, schools can be diligent in their enforcement of hemlines and strap widths and still miss the overall Spirit evoked by a particular line of clothing. A baggy Abercrombie T-shirt is probably more spiritually dangerous than any spaghetti strap dress. If our dress codes are to be effective and meaningful, they must take a broader view. Educators must become wise to the clothing spiritualities of the clothes children are wearing, and they must find ways to expose and resist the spiritualities that are antithetical to the Christian gospel.

Does the new climate mean that now is the time for uniforms? I think we should revisit the issue. This article is being written

by a pastor and not an educator. Decisions about dress codes and uniforms are certainly best made by the people on the front lines of education. But from my limited perspective, the following arguments support the use of uniforms in Christian schools:

1. While dress codes are by nature negative ("Thou Shalt Not wear..."), uniforms *can* be a positive statement of our Spirit. They fully recognize and address the spiritual nature of clothes. Our uniforms can say something like: "we wear uniforms because we, who are many, are one body united by one Spirit. This is the uniform of our team. The cut and color of these clothes are chosen with our Christian values in mind." When Christian schools have their students wear uniforms, they can send the message to the world that they stand for something different.

2. Elitism is broken down. Throughout


fashion history, clothes have been markers of status. Rich people showed their wealth and power and status through their attire. Things are no different in this age of Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfiger. Kids are intimidated and marginalized when they can't keep up with the fashion parade. Uniforms put an end to the status games and the intimidation.

3. Uniforms take pressure off male teachers. Many male teachers have told me that the hardest thing about dress codes is the difficulty of confronting female students who have violated the code. If a girl's neck line is too low or her skirt too high, a male teacher who points this out runs the risk of being called a "perv," or, worse, of being accused of sexual harassment. As a result, female teachers get an unfair share of the enforcement burden and risk strained relationships with female students. Enforcement of uniforms is less sexualized

and can be more equally shared between the genders.

Uniforms create a team focus. What are the groups who wear uniforms in our culture? The military. Sports teams. Certain tightly run companies. All of these are places where the group takes precedence over the individual. When you go into the military, you give up much of your personal right to self-expression for the sake of the group. When you join a sports team, your focus is supposed to be on the team, not on your individual statistics. A person wearing a uniform is sending the message that "While I am important, this is not primarily about me. I am part of a group and I put the group first."

This sort of thinking runs against the ethos of our society. We seem to value individual self-expression above all. But this sort of thinking is completely out of line with the gospel and with the basis of our Christian schools. We are not individualists; we are covenantal communities. We actually make it a point of dying to ourselves and sacrificing ourselves for others. We are not our own but belong body and soul, in life and in death, to someone else. Uniforms could be a powerful statement of this gracious truth that stands at the center of the church and at the center of our Christian schools.

It's a new world out there when it comes to clothing our children. May the God of the covenant continue to give us his wisdom. 

INSTITUTE FOR CHRISTIAN STUDIES

Graduate Studies In Education

The Institute For Christian Studies provides students with the opportunity to explore the integral role of faith in learning. ICS offers a two-year Masters degree in Philosophical Foundations and a one-year Masters degree in Worldview Studies with a full and part-time program in Education, both on-campus and in distance mode.



ICS' Professor of Education is **Doug Blomberg** Ph.D. (Sydney), M.Ed.St., Ed.D. (Monash) Dr. Blomberg has been involved with Christian schooling at all levels for 30 years. He is the editor and co-author of several volumes including *A vision with a task*. His research centres on a biblical perspective on wisdom, and he has recently completed a book focusing on the implications for school curriculum.



229 College Street, Toronto, ON, M5T 1R4, Canada
1-888-326-5347 ext. 243 registrar@icscanada.edu
www.icscanada.edu

Do Not Go Gently

by Jan Kaarsvlam

Jan Kaarsvlam recently took an unscheduled sabbatical from Kelloggsville Christian School in Michigan at the suggestion of the school board. Despite the repeated attempts of Principal Vince Bonnema to convince him that the school had absolutely no connection with the Kellogg Company, Kaarsvlam had led the students on a three-day sit-in to protest the use of absurd and unhealthy amounts of sugar used in Kellogg's Frosted Flakes. Finding himself with free time, he has decided to make a run for President of the United States under the banner of his own party, the Christian School Teachers' Liberation Front.

The faculty of Bedlam Christian High School gathered in the staff room with the relentless inevitability of lint collecting in a belly button. They tore into their respective lunches with wild abandon, none more vigorously than shop teacher Gord Winkle, who brought his lunch in a paper grocery bag and needed every moment of the twenty-minute lunch session to consume the three chicken-pasta salads, two foot-long submarine sandwiches made with low-carb bread, six low-fat chocolate chip cookies, and a can of fat-free whipped cream for garnishing the various elements of his little feast. As usual, there was a moment of silence at the beginning of lunch as Winkle's colleagues stared at the spectacle of his lunch.

Maxwell Prentiss-Hall, one of Bedlam's guidance counselors, broke the silence. "Hey, Kleinhut," he said, addressing the paranoid librarian, "I heard you were thinking about retiring next year." Jon Kleinhut looked up from the two kiwis that comprised his lunch. "Who told you that?" He eyed Maxwell suspiciously.

"I don't remember," Max replied innocently. "Maybe VanderHaar."

"That really frosts my cookies!" Kleinhut said. "This

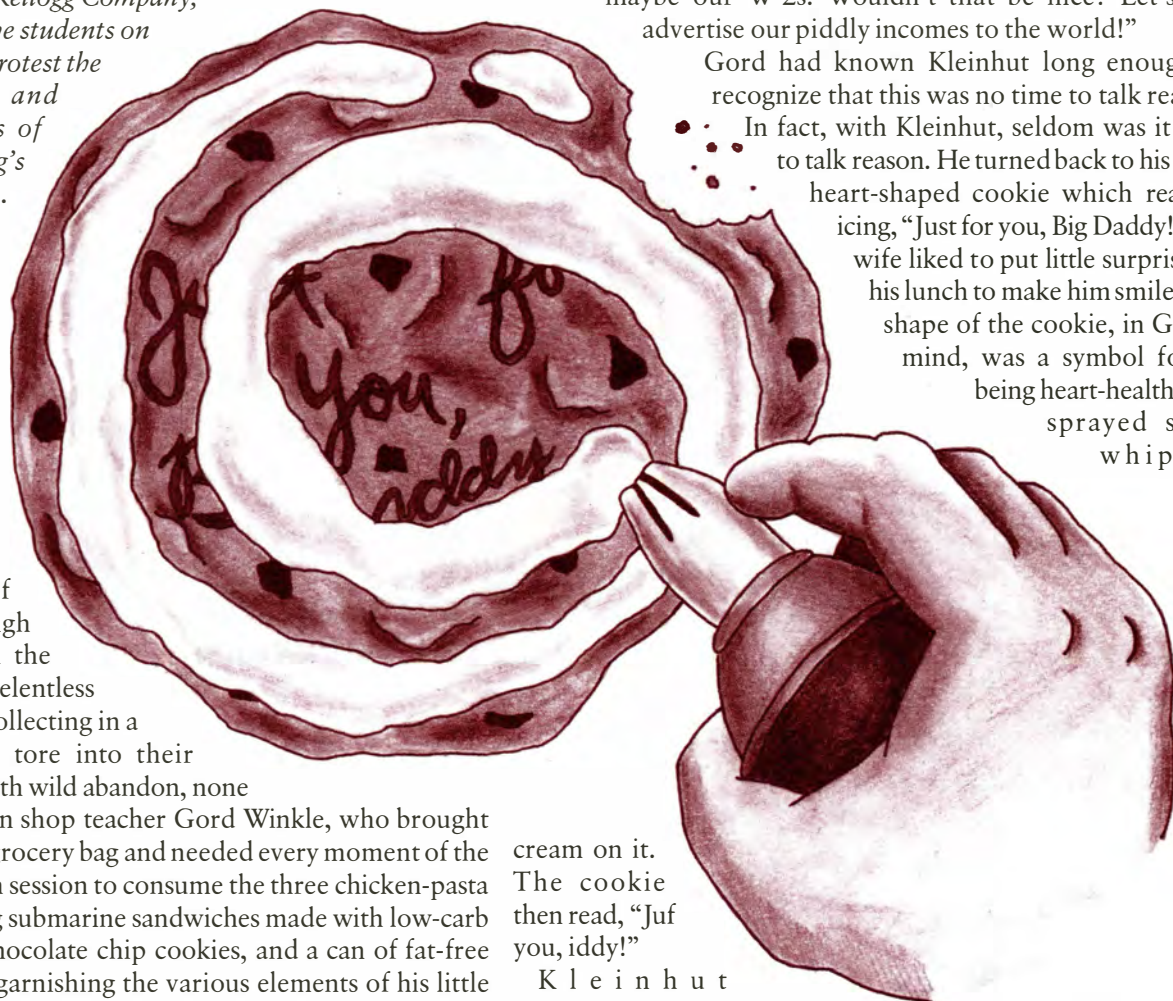
administration has been trying to push me out the door for four years now. First they plaster my picture all over the Internet...."

"But Jon," Winkle protested, "that was the school website. All the faculty have their pictures on it."

"Sure, and next it will be our social security numbers. Or maybe our W-2s. Wouldn't that be nice? Let's just advertise our piddly incomes to the world!"

Gord had known Kleinhut long enough to recognize that this was no time to talk reason.

In fact, with Kleinhut, seldom was it time to talk reason. He turned back to his giant heart-shaped cookie which read in icing, "Just for you, Big Daddy!" His wife liked to put little surprises in his lunch to make him smile. The shape of the cookie, in Gord's mind, was a symbol for its being heart-healthy. He sprayed some whipped



cream on it. The cookie then read, "Juf you, iddy!"

Kleinhut continued. "Besides, this whole Internet thing is only the tip of the iceberg. What about when they forced me to computerize the card catalogue four years ago? Now Big Brother can watch every book that everybody's reading. I fought that tooth and nail, but no one would listen. I was a voice crying in the desert."

The word *desert* made Gord think of dessert. Brushing away the remaining crumbs of his cookie, he dug in the bag to see what was for dessert. He produced a small three-layer chocolate cake with strawberry halves adorning the top. He had been trying to eat more fruit lately, and the chocolate cake was a good

Into That Good Retirement

or Good Night, Sweet Teacher, and May Cheap Flights Carry You to Florida

incentive.

Cal Vandermeer, Bedlam's occasional voice of sanity, set aside his PBJ and turned toward Kleinhut. "Now settle down, Jon. You yourself were bragging last month that you had set aside enough money to retire in that Roswell, New Mexico place. Besides, you've been saying you're thinking of retiring next year for the last fifteen years. You can't blame Bently for taking you at your word."

"It is my business when I retire!" Kleinhut was standing up now and shaking his fist.

Gord had noticed that biology teacher Sam Toomer appeared to have left two uneaten slices of summer sausage in front of him. Gord pointed at them and raised his eyebrows. Sam nodded. Gord whisked them away and began spraying whipped cream on them.

Cal began to get uncharacteristically feisty, too. "Maybe it becomes his business when a teacher starts acting like he's biding time for the big retirement, and then it never comes. You can only bide your time for so long."

"Watch it, VanderMeer," Kleinhut said, his voice a low growl. "You can only hit a dog so many times before he bites you."

"Is that supposed to be a threat?" VanderMeer asked.

Kleinhut gave a snort of derision. "Let him who has ears attend," he said. Then he spun on his heel and left the room. VanderMeer, red in the face, followed him out the door. In their wake trailed an uncomfortable silence that was finally broken by the fizzy, gassy sound of Winkle's can of whipped cream expelling the last of its contents.

Christina Lopez, who, before the brouhaha, had been calmly grading her seniors' papers on post-structural feminist archetypes in the Marx Brothers' *Duck Soup*, dropped her pen and said to Jane VanderAsch beside her, "You ever feel like you're trapped in a Eugene Ionesco play?"

VanderAsch, a math teacher who had not read a piece of literature since Dwight D. Eisenhower held office, stared blankly at her.

Lopez sighed. Jane was one of several teachers at Bedlam who seemed to have checked out long ago. She had no enthusiasm for students, no interest in learning new things herself, and no intentions to retire in the next ten years. Christina wondered to herself if there was a way to solve this problem.

Overcommitted computer technician Wally Friedman, who had been talking to a sales representative on his cell phone and at the same time fiddling with a loose hard drive and a tiny screwdriver, looked up and said, "Personally, I think the whole idea of retirement is pretty lame. Why would anyone ever want to stop working? Work is what gives our life meaning." He turned to

talk into his cell phone. "Just get me those cooling fans, you schmendrick!"

Jane VanderAsch sighed. "I don't want to seem like an old teacher here, Wally, but you're only in your early thirties. When you have been teaching for twenty-seven years, like I have, you'll be looking forward to a bit of a rest."

"I am sympathetic to that, Jane," said Christina Lopez, "but you can't give up when you are called to something. As long as you are here, you have to put your heart into it."

Jane got the tight-lipped expression that she wore whenever she wanted to yell at someone. She never yelled at anyone, however, though it was unclear whether that was because she feared reprisal or because she simply lacked the energy.

"Look," said Lopez, "I don't want to offend you, Jane, but around this time of year we always complain that the seniors are checked out. They all argue that they've worked hard through three-and-a-half years of school and now they want to coast. We don't let them do it, so how can you argue that teachers in the waning twilight of their careers should?"

"That's true," said Winkle as he collected the refuse from his lunch and placed it in his bag. "Sometimes I think we should take the model that we use for preachers. Generally, preachers don't stay at a single church for more than ten or twelve years. The assumption is that they stay fresher by moving around and challenging themselves. I know that was true for my career. I taught for ten years, then I worked as a carpenter for eight years before returning to teach shop again. The change of pace was good for me."

Jane gritted her teeth to keep control, then spoke. "That's fine for you, Gord. I can't go work as a carpenter for a few years. I can't switch to another Christian school because with my experience, I am too expensive for them. Most public schools won't count experience in the private school, so I would be right back to where I was twenty-six years ago. What am I supposed to do?"

"Teach new classes," Christina said. "Try new methods, join a book group, take a course, go to conferences. There's a lot you can do to keep your classroom, and your life, more exciting if you really want to."

Rex Kane barged through the door carrying a brightly colored brochure. "Hey everybody! I just heard that Kleinhut is retiring next year. I thought he might want to check this out. You can vacation really cheaply in Cuba these days, and I figured, since he's always going on and on about how the communists are taking over, this would be a good chance for him to get in on the ground floor." ☺

Oh! The Places You'll Go



by Roy Berkenbosch

Roy Berkenbosch is campus minister at the King's University College in Edmonton, Alta. The article is taken from a graduation address he gave at Edmonton Christian High School on June 26, 2003. The speech, entitled "I will be with you," was based on Psalm 23 but shaped by Dr. Seuss.

Congratulations, today is your day
You're off to great places
You're off and away!
You have brains in your head
You have feet in your shoes
You can steer yourself any direction you choose
You're on your own and you know what you know
And YOU are the one who'll decide where to go.*

That's how Dr. Seuss begins his famous graduation speech, and all of us sitting here this evening say, "right on" to this. Congratulations alright. You've done it! We are all proud of you and thankful to God who makes celebrations like this possible, because after all God is the one who puts brains in your heads and feet in your shoes....

When Michelle Struik invited me to speak, she laid down the gauntlet. We want you to speak on our theme, "I Will Be With You Always" and also on Psalm 23, "The Lord Is My Shepherd." And here's Dr. Seuss's book so you know how we want you to do it. The gospel writer meets the Psalmist meets Dr. Seuss. Well, Michelle, I've decided to take you up on the challenge, and I've prepared my talk according to your demanding specifications. Here it is:

Dear Grad Class of 2003:

The Lord is your shepherd, the keeper of sheep
He's been with you always, awake or asleep.
Ever since you were small, still crawling in diapers,
Chasing after butterflies, or following pied-pipers
Through twelve years of winters, springs, summers and falls

In classrooms and playgrounds, gyms, bathrooms and halls;
Through thicks and through thins, in losses and wins,
In all times and places, wherever you've been:
The shepherd's been there, taking care of the lot,
He's always been there, if you knew it or not.

Remember grade one, the excitement, the dread,
Numbers and letters all mixed up in your head
Learning to write and learning to read
Remembering to wash your hands when you peed.
The teachers were patient and unusually kind
And with eyes front and back, those teachers weren't blind.
Listen up class, repeat after me,
"1 + 1 + 1 = 3"

Quicker than quick, things got more complex
Your brain got bigger and you learned about sex.
Numbers were doubled, halved and subtracted
And, could you believe it, even verbs were contracted!
Crayons were done for, the time came for pens
And bugs were examined through microscope's lens;
Histories and mysteries, poems and plays
Phys. Ed. and Home Ec. and sculpting with clay,
Fractions and formulae, dates and reminders
Maps, notes, and doodles filled up all your binders.
Oh, the things you discovered with your brains in high gear
Were splendid and stunning year after year.
Three cheers for the teachers, those guides in the quest!
And five more for the learners who wrote all the tests!

But the best things you learned weren't written in books,
As if life was a recipe and you were just cooks.
No, the best lessons learned were more subtle and lasting,
About living and loving, not failing and passing.
About friendships and kindness, the need to connect;
Sameness and difference, acceptance, respect;
Finding beauty and strength in your sisters and brothers
Bringing courage to fear, and forgiveness to others.
Some choices you made were brighter than brilliance
Others were not – but you discovered resilience.
Some days you flew higher than a hot air balloon
And believed you could jump halfway to the moon.
But some days were downers, you felt lonely and lost
And you learned that wisdom comes at a cost.



Yes, you've glimpsed with amazement how rich life can be
If you keep your eyes open and learn how to see.

"You've looked up and down streets, looked em over with care
About some you can say, "I don't choose to go there"
With your head full of brains and your shoes full of feet
You're too smart to go down any not-so-good street" (Seuss)

So here's to you, cheers and hooray!!
You made it at last, your high school grad day.

I don't mean to put an end to your grinning,
but let me remind you, this is also a beginning.
From here you move on to this place or that,
To King's, maybe, or Calvin, (but I wouldn't like that!)
The future awaits you, a life filled with choices.
How will you choose between all the voices
that call and cajole, seduce and invite?
Where will you go, to the left, to the right?
Which friends will you call, what job will you seek,
Not just today, but tomorrow, next week?

"You will come to a place where the streets are not marked
Some windows are lighted. But mostly they're darked
A place you could sprain both your elbow and chin
Do you dare to stay out? Do you dare to go in?
How much can you lose? How much can you win
And IF you go in, should you turn left or right
Or right and three-quarters? Or maybe not quite?
Or go around back and sneak in from behind?
Simple it's not, I'm afraid you will find
For a mind maker upper to make up her mind." (Seuss)

Remember that Shepherd, the keeper of sheep?
The one who is with you, awake or asleep?
In order to help you sort through the maze
He's called you to follow the trail that he's blazed.
He won't lead you down dead ends or blind alleys
Nor abandon you when you pass through dark valleys.
He's a good shepherd, and knows what you need
So trust and obey him, go where he leads.

But don't think for a minute that his journey is boring,
All pastures and meadows and sheep sweetly snoring.
To follow is risky, demands all you've got,
All the strength in your body, your whole mind, every thought.
There may be crosses to carry, other dreams to forsake.
But great blessings await the ones who make
common cause with the Shepherd, who loves what he loves.
Whose lives fit his purpose like a hand in a glove.
Who seek freedom for captives, and justice and peace
Strength for the weary, hope for the least.
Who turn all their learning, advantage and skill
To the service of Jesus, seeking his will.

Oh, the places you'll go, and the things you will see
when you choose to become all that you can be.
There's fame in your future, and power and wealth,
You'll win every lottery, and have only good health.
You'll live to a hundred, no doubt in my mind,
And get standing ovations from all human kind.

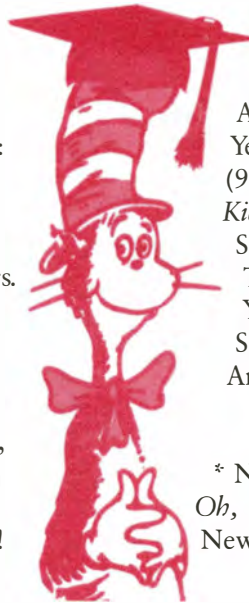
Not. Not really. I'm kidding, its plain to see
that you are as normal as normal can be.
That means you'll get sick and lonely and blue
And sometimes people won't even notice you.
Sometimes it will feel like your last friend left town
And people you've trusted might let you down.
Your heart might get broken by a person you love,
And other disasters I can't even speak of.

Of course I wish only good, and not one thing that's bad
But bad things might happen, and you might get sad.
So I want to remind you, once more just in case,
God's love is forever, you can count on God's grace.

Remember the Shepherd, the keeper of sheep?
The one who is with you, awake or asleep?
Get this, he knows every lamb in his care
like the back of his hand, even numbered their hair.
If a sheep wanders off and gets into big trouble
The shepherd will find him, bring him back on the double.
There's no place you can go, there's no thing you can do
To make that Shepherd care less about you.

Wherever you travel, wherever you go
 There's hundreds of things that are helpful to know:
 Like when to go forward and when to turn back
 And how many socks to stick in your sack.
 But the one thing to know above all the others
 Is that God loves you - more than even your mothers.
 The Shepherd, the One who takes care of the sheep
 He'll always be with you, awake or asleep.

So be sure when you leave, of that indisputable fact,
 And then dance out your dance and act out your act
 Live your life to the fullest, never settle for less,
 And say "Amen!" a lot because "Amen!" means YES!



And will you succeed?
 Yes you will, indeed
 (98 and $\frac{1}{2}$ percent guaranteed.)
Kid you'll move mountains.
 So be your name Struik or Mobach, Mahaffy or Ooms
 Today is your day, let's be done with the poems!
 Your mountain is waiting
 So... get up, get out and get on your way!
 And God bless you all, today and every day.

* Note that all lines in italics are directly quoted from *Oh, the Places You'll Go* by Dr. Seuss, Random House, New York, 1990. ©

Calvin College Bookstore



DISCERNING THE SPIRITS: A Guide to Thinking about Christian Worship Today by Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. and Sue A. Rozeboom. \$18.00

The contributors to this volume look carefully at the issues surrounding contemporary worship practices and offer solid theological insight as to what the church in North America is up to in its assemblies. They hold for continued debate over worship forms and styles even as they teach us to argue in love, always discerning, never judging.

HIGH-TECH WORSHIP?: Using Presentational Technologies Wisely by Quentin Schultze. \$10.99

Schultze takes a thoughtful look at this issue, giving practical guidance on how to best use the gift of technology in your church. Learn when to adopt, reject, or adapt technologies to help worshippers encounter God in fresh and meaningful ways.

WORSHIP SEEKING UNDERSTANDING: Windows Into Christian Practice by John D. Witvliet. \$26.99

Witvliet covers a wide range of issues, including sacraments, lament, liturgy, pastoral ministry, biblical foundations, and contemporary worship concerns. He does so with a breadth of knowledge, a vision for authentic worship, and a love for the church.

CALVIN
College

All of these books are available through Calvin College Bookstore, 3201 Burton St., S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49546, 800-748-0122 Please include 6% tax if you are a Michigan resident. Shipping and handling is \$5.00 per order. Make checks payable to Calvin College Bookstore or call with your Mastercard, VISA, or Discover card.



Nancy Knol
Column Editor
njknol@apl.com

The Fourth Generation

by Nancy Knol

*Nancy Knol teaches English and religion at Grand Rapids Christian High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She is co-author of the book *Reaching and Teaching Young Adolescents*. Most days you can find her in Room 219.*

A rather unexpected thing happened to me recently. I was teaching the story "Revelation" by Flannery O'Connor to my ninth-grade English class, and I asked them to write a description of the main character, Mrs. Turpin. "Tell me," I prompted them, "how another title for this story could almost be 'Portrait of a Pharisee.'" They all began writing, but one student came to my desk and asked, "What is a Pharisee?"

The unexpected question got me thinking about Christian education and some of the assumptions that we might be making about how much our students actually know about the basics of biblical teaching and stories. Perhaps when you or I attended school (if we attended a Christian school) the language of the Bible was familiar, but that is becoming less true in this post-modern world. I have frequently encountered students who have no definite church affiliation. A few years ago a student was paging through one of the Bibles in my classroom and commented on how unusual it was to have a book in the Bible about jobs (Job). He was not joking.


How do we account for this? I am reminded of a story I read a short time ago about the Jewish leader, the Baal Shem Tov. Because he believed he was near death, he gathered his people together and said, "Do you know the place in the forest where I call out to God? Stand there in that place and do the same. Light a fire as you have been instructed to do, and say the prayer as you learned. Do all these and God will come."

As the story goes, the first generation followed his instructions carefully. But the next generation couldn't remember part of the instructions about how to build the fire. All the same they still journeyed to the holy place in the forest. And the third generation of course did not know about the fire any more, but they also forgot where the holy place in the forest was located. However, they could still remember the words to the prayer. Well, finally when the fourth generation took over, they could not even recite the prayer any longer. No one remembered it. But they knew there was some story about the Baal Shem Tov reminding his people to be faithful. So they told that story as best they could.

Sometimes I am afraid for the generation we are teaching. They are far beyond my experience at their age in so many good ways. Global issues matter to them. They are experiencing the truth of the "global village" in ways we never dreamed of when we went to school. The student population in many of our schools

is far more diverse, which invites harmony and growth and understanding. Opportunities for using gifts of all kinds are more far-reaching and more exciting. Classroom discussions and technology resources are far more inviting now.

And yet. How much of the story has been forgotten? What have we assumed or discarded or overlooked that needs to shape and give significance to what we are so creatively setting before our students? Of course, the home bears a huge responsibility in this regard, but so do we. As our students learn to articulate their knowledge, they must also see it in the context of the Christian faith. If we fail in this regard, we are only private institutions, not really Christian schools. Long ago the prophet cried out, "The people without a vision perish!" And if we do not have a vision, we deserve to perish.

The best part of the Jewish legend about the Baal Shem Tov was that even though each generation lost a piece of the instructions, God continued to come to them. He takes what he can get. Yet I am haunted sometimes by the question of Jesus recorded in Luke 18: "...but when the Son of Man returns, will He find faith upon the earth?" Our challenge is to hold on to what we know is true, and ignite the love of truth in the hearts of our students. 



Creating Inclusive Community

Christ-centered educational, psychological, vocational, and advocacy services for people experiencing unique needs and gifts.



Christian Learning Center

Consultation services available in areas of:

- Inclusion
- Learning Disabilities
- ADHD
- Supported Employment

Contact: R.H. "Bear" Berends
2520 Eastern Ave. SE,
Grand Rapids, MI 49507
Phone: 616-245-8388
E-mail: Bear@clcnetwork.org

They Also Serve

(A poem for retiring teachers)

So you stood in front of a class ...
How long, did you say?
Thirty, forty years?
They also serve who only stand and wait ...
wait for the Genesis-modified
seeds of wisdom
to fall into warm furrows of eager hearts.



It has been rumored that
teaching is little more than
parceling out mind stuff:
two times two equals four;
an iambic pentameter is five
measures to a line of poetry.
But you knew all along that
facts are but building blocks
and not the edifice of knowledge itself.
And even knowledge
must yield to wisdom
which unfolds its incredibly
splendorous wings
as it emerges from a room full of
fear-of-the-Lord cocoons.
You of all people
knew all along that
wisdom answers to the purpose of life
and is disseminated by God
so that hired minds and mouths
like you can
recruit children and teenagers
to become salt-of-the-earth people
ambassadors of a new world order
agents of change in a self-destructive society

tillers of every acre of life
inch by royal inch
until Christ returns to end
the cycle of sin and death.



You knew yourself to be keepers of
a grand vision (the kingdom)
and recipients of a grand promise
(the covenant).
And so you practiced the tricky art
of heart and mind shaping
with confidence and expectation.
You did not stand alone.
Your school started out many years ago
as a tradition of obedience
which one would like to think
evolved into a community of grace.
You gained more insight
into the nature of wisdom learning.
From a beginning that was teacher-oriented
like all schooling of that day
you were willing to become child-oriented
not child-centered like
your secular counterparts
God is still in control
and teachers must still
direct the mining of wisdom.



How many shifts of pupils
have you welcomed into
your four-walled protectorate?
Or did you think of
the isolation as a huddle?

God's mansion of learning
has many classrooms
and every September you prepared
a place for a new set of tenants.
And then the annual ritual of
teaching, modeling, guiding, cajoling
would begin only to grind to
a welcome halt the end of June.
Or was it at times the grind
that came to a grinding halt?



Your years of service were not without
vale-of-tears frustrations
and shadow-of-death obstacles.
You had after all been incorporated into
a fallible community of stubborn saints.
Sometimes as at the waters of Meribah
the board struck the rock of grace
with a stick of anger and self-righteousness.
Boards and parents did not always
do their homework
on speaking the truth in love.
Truth does not set free without grace.
Perhaps today we all need a new assignment
that grace is not amazing without truth.
If only all of us would go to class
more with Jesus who,
says the textbook, came from the Father
full of grace and truth.
But the whole school community
is allowed to embrace
the today of new beginnings
again and again

seventy times seven.
As are you, retiring teacher.
Obedience steeped in love
goes a long way to bring a body back
to the task at hand.
And our God is faithful.



To that faithful God
the Ancient One
we now appeal for your protection
as you withdraw from the formal task
of teaching, modeling, guiding and cajoling.
May your memories be sweet
of those days you were able to
cultivate warm hearts and open minds.
Better one day in a Spirit-imbued
Christ-centered and Father-blessed classroom
than a thousand elsewhere.
May your insights and love
continue to refresh God's courts
of private and public life.
They also serve who retire
but do not grow faint.
May the Lord God be
your sun and shield.
May he not withhold
any good thing from you.
May you go from strength to strength
till you appear before God in Zion –
your everlasting Teacher
your eternal Principal. ©

Bert Witvoet



Do Varsity Sports Spawn Elitism?

Clarence Joldersma (cjolders@calvin.edu) professor of education at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich., asked the Dot Edu panel to address the issue of varsity sports. He writes: "Most schools run varsity sports teams such as basketball, football and soccer. These use a great deal of human and other resources, are restricted to a tiny percentage of students, and create an elite group among the students. Don't varsity sports undermine the aims of Christian education?"

Note to our readers:

Tim Hoeksema has decided to step down from this panel. We thank him very much for his past contributions. We will miss his pragmatic voice. In his place has stepped Agnes Fisher, someone who has taught at Eastern Christian School about 25 years. We welcome her Eastern voice.

March 3, 2004

Clarence, You have given us a hot-button issue. Our parents and fellow staff members and constituents are passionate about this topic. Some see school varsity sports as a program to develop excellence of performance and strong bonds with others committed to this goal. Others see intramural sports as achieving similar goals with less cost and broader scope. Still others see sports as recreation and recreation as the responsibility of the broader community rather than the school.

Perhaps the bigger question is: How do we develop a vision and view about issues that have the potential for being so divisive? What is the role of parents and constituents in such decisions? What about a student voice? What criteria do we use to decide what programs a school will support?

Can we think about expanding the athletic program so that everyone has an opportunity of recreational play? Or is this about providing an honors program that develops expertise and discipline that not everyone can or will achieve?

Further, what myths or popular wisdom should we debunk?



Lois Brink

Are sports programs about community bonding events and don't these programs fund themselves? How strong is the sports hero image compared to other school "heroes"?

I wonder what you all will have to say about this.

Lois Brink

March 6, 2004

Lois, You are correct in saying this is a hot-button issue. In Northwest Iowa, several Christian high schools are adding football to their roster of sports that already includes basketball, volleyball, softball, baseball, golf, tennis, track, cross country, soccer, and wrestling. In a sense varsity sports is an honors program. Some critics of academic honors programs claim they benefit only a few and foster elitism; this can be said of sports as well. However, I don't believe it is so much having these various opportunities that is the issue. The issue is the enormous attention we give to sports in our culture. Most of us have no problem when Jordan is singled out because he won the state debate contest or that Hannah and Kinsley's history project won in the state competition. Jordan, Hannah, and Kinsley will receive scant attention and they are in little danger of becoming part of an elitist clique. Our culture is very sport-crazed and our Christian schools are following the trend. So the real question is: are we willing to buck the culture and do things differently in our Christian schools? That is the challenge.

Pam Adams



Pam Adams

March 10, 2004

Hi Lois and Pam, You left us with the question, Pam: Do we buck the culture and do things differently, maybe Christianly, in our schools? If we offer sports do we give equal weight to all sports and not single out, let's say basketball, over all the others? Are our students aware of the possibility of making sports their idol?

Do we give a balanced amount of time to each sport? On the other hand, if they have gifts and talents in this area, are they encouraged to develop them? I think from a biblical perspective, we are not to show favoritism to the sports stars in our school, but accept them equally and encourage them as we would a student with gifts in art. To me, it is a question of balance in our lives and in our school. God's Word tells us to use all our gifts for



Johanna Campbell



Clarence Joldersma

him, not to play favorites, and to glorify him in all we do. How do we put that into practise in sports?

"The man who fears God will avoid all extremes" (Eccl. 7:18). Now, to put this concept of balance into practise in all areas of our lives! I know about this from personal experience because our family is blessed with two tall basketball players. Both had to find out by (painful) experience that basketball was not to be their idol. God worked it in their hearts, but it took time. One learned in high school, the other had to continue playing in university to find that out. The two siblings with other gifts just enjoyed watching the games!

Johanna Campbell

March 14, 2004

Hi all, I suspect a Canadian perspective on this may be a little different than that of my fellow Kingdom citizens from America. I know that high school football games and basketball games in some States can outdraw NHL hockey teams in terms of fan support. Stunning! Generally, in our Christian high schools in Ontario, schools will devote a reasonable proportionate amount of resources to non-athletic pursuits like bands and drama productions. Still, there is something about sports that does intoxicate us, and success in it counts for a great deal.

I've seen both sides of this issue among parents and supporters of Christian schools. If their child is a weaker athlete, or perhaps less experienced, they will say things like, "I can't believe my daughter doesn't get more playing time! I would have thought a Christian school would have a different approach than just being out there to win!" If their child is a top-notch player, their line of reasoning tends to be: "It's good to pursue excellence sometimes. After all God likes to see his gifts used to the best of our ability. We have intramurals to strive for wide levels of participation. Interscholastic competition should focus on being the best we can be!"

In our local grade school, this tension comes to the fore when we approach the annual Christian school hockey tournament. Do we use some fifth-grade players who play "rep" hockey in the community league, or do we let the eighth-grade students who don't otherwise get to play organized hockey have those spots on the team (even though they don't understand the basic rules and help our team get slaughtered every time they play)? Is there any "character building" that goes on when you lose all your games? Or does it promote an "our school just sucks at stuff" sort of



Tony Kamphuis

feeling?

I like sports. They, too, provide an arena for students to learn life lessons and to develop character, and they provide the opportunity for success for some students who may find less of that in their academic pursuits. Sure, they shouldn't monopolize our resources, but with a reasonably balanced approach they can add a great deal to the communities that form around our schools, and some of that would be sorely missed without sports.

Tony Kamphuis

March 15, 2004

Hi everyone, Although I'm new to this column, I'm going to just dive right in. I don't think sports undermine the aim of Christian education. In many ways they support and extend what we strive to do. There is a problem when there is an overemphasis on sports. When parents howl at the players, coaches insist on wins, media represent students virtually as commodities, then there are problems. When sports is supported over and above the arts, then we have a problem. Creativity and expression often take second or third place to other activities and especially to sports programs. (But we must also remember that in terms of money, most sports programs are self-supporting.) Students need to be well-rounded and taught to use all their gifts to the best of their ability in honor of their Creator and to glorify him in their use and development. We do need to balance the physical with the creative. This is not yet the case.

Agnes Fisher



Agnes Fisher

March 17, 2004

Hi all, and welcome to the panel, Agnes. All the comments about balance, culture and discernment in sports go to the heart of Christian education. Clarence asked about meshing varsity sports with our reformed perspective and Christian educational mission, and you all responded with two critical issues. If we are preparing students with skills, knowledge, and dispositions for Christian life, how can a varsity sports program be a part of this goal? Perhaps every Christian school community ought to ask - and answer - some questions about its varsity sports program. Here are some that you can pick and choose from.

1. About the coaches: I have talked with a number of college students who train to be teachers with the hope of being sports coaches. How are we preparing them to bring discernment and

balance as well as expertise to their coaching? How do we consider these in the selection of coaches? How do we support and encourage school coaches to promote this balance and discernment? How are coaches held accountable? How important is a winning coach? How important is a winning team? A winning player?

2. About the role of expert players: A number of high school students and their parents decide early on to specialize in one sport. Year round clubs, teams and camps are family-financed in order to develop expertise in this area. One rationale is that this commitment provides a path to college scholarships. Articulate the school's position about "entering expertise" and the composition of varsity teams? What kinds of individual growth are expected through the varsity program? Is equal opportunity for varsity play across financial differences addressed? How? How important are non - varsity sports opportunities for students and families who make other choices? How important is a winning season? A winning player?

3. About the role of sports in the broader community: Articulate the most important issues for coaching and playing in varsity sports programs. How are parent and community sports opinions and passions addressed in a way that reflects and seeks this perspective? Are we addressing the balance between varsity sports expertise, recognition and financial reward and other school supported areas so that all are provided with equal and just benefits? Why is a winning team important? A winning player?

4. About the role of sports within the school and student community: How important is the winning team? The winning player? How are all individual and team efforts supported and recognized across the school and broader community? What is the balance between sports and non-sports in terms of support and recognition? How are issues of cultural balance and discernment addressed in school?

5. About the sports themselves: Articulate the core values, goals and mission of each sport program. How are issues of staff time, facility, and other program costs considered and balanced in the varsity sports program? In the selection of sports to be offered, what criteria are used? Is the decision to support varsity sports rather than, say, intramural or recreational sports programs, well articulated, based on mission and core beliefs, balance and discernment, even the tenets of our reformed Christian worldview?

We would do well to ask these kinds of questions about all of our school program decisions.

Lois Brink

The panel consists of:

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

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

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

Agnes Fisher (agnesfisher@easternchristian.org) is a teacher of English, Humanities and Art at Eastern Christian High School, North Haledon, New Jersey.

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

Email Letter to the Panel

Dear Panel Dot Edu,

The responses to the "college professor" who complained that too many students equated learning with memorization were entertaining but did not address the question, "What characterizes K-12 learning?" There were explanations of why things are the way they are, allegations that college education is also characterized by memorization, and idealistic descriptions of how learning ought to be designed, but there was no evidence put forth to support or refute the "professor's" assertion. I suggest that panel and the professor undertake a little research project:

1. Each panelist and the professor will collect tests recently given to students in the schools they represent (no one may use tests they have given themselves).


2. Each person will evaluate the tests in reference to the following questions:

- a. What types of learning is the student asked to demonstrate?
- b. How would a student go about preparing for this test?
- c. What types of learning goals are implied by the tests?

3. Each panelist and the professor will report what they learn from the tests to CEJ readers.

I eagerly anticipate the research report.

Bruce Hulst (bhulst@remc7.k12.mi.us)

Unity Christian High School
Hudsonville, Michigan 

The Wiz'dəm Uv Prak'tis

by James Rooks

James Rooks is associate professor of education at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, MI. He's also a member of the CEJ board.

About fifteen years ago when whole language was at the height of its power and influence, a friend who was teaching first grade told me that her strong readers seemed to be really flourishing, but she thought that the whole language approach was not really helping her weaker students. This comment was insightful and prescient: subsequent research supported her intuition that weak readers are disadvantaged by whole language reading instruction and that they benefit more from direct phonics instruction (Pressley, 2000; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998).

Last year I ran into my friend again. She is still teaching in the primary grades, but she has moved 2500 miles to a Christian school on the West Coast in the intervening fifteen years. Popular opinion about whole language has moved even further. How does she view the phonics phoenix? "Our school has swung away from whole language and now everyone is compelled to use the phonics workbooks, but I don't think these workbooks really help many of my students. Besides, this passive, workbook-based teaching doesn't really fit how we see children and their learning." I was struck again by her astute observations. While there is no clarity about the best type of phonics instruction, the research is clear that the kind of phonics which her school is now using is not effective (Stahl 2001), and the sound and sensible biblical arguments that were made fifteen years ago against this kind of phonics workbook instruction still carry great heft (Bosma and

Blok, 1992).

If you are a teacher of students in the early elementary grades, then you are well aware of the ongoing whole language versus phonics controversy. And even if you are not an elementary school teacher, you are probably aware of the erratic and confusing swings from phonics to whole language and then back to phonics again, of the wholesale changes from one method to the other that have been dictated by some school districts and states over the past twenty years, of everyone jumping on the educational bandwagon headed in one direction only to jump onto one headed in completely the opposite direction a few

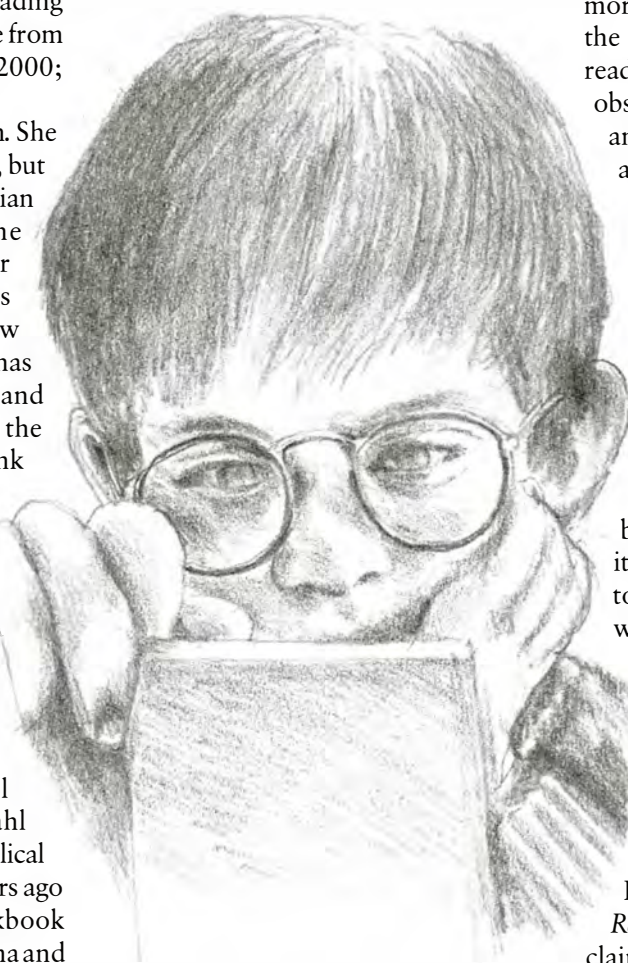
years later.

Examining the controversy

The story of competing approaches to teaching reading is well known ... or is it?

Is the nature of the story self-evident? Should we accept the story at face value, or is it possibly a misrepresentation of persons and events in the recent history of teaching reading and an over-simplification of things which are actually quite complicated? What can we learn from the story? Collectively, we need to step back and examine the story as it is commonly understood. As a community of Christian teachers and scholars, we need to examine more closely and reflect more deeply on the nature of the story being told about reading instruction. Does it clash with and obscure how we see things as Christians and our way of operating in this world and our understanding of our task?

To search for an understanding of reading and how one learns to read is to search for a clearer understanding of who we are as part of God's creation; pursuing these questions is one of the tasks for which we have been created. There is "an ability imparted to man to unwrap the thoughts of God that lie embodied in creation ... an ability not added to but based in human nature itself" (Kuyper, 1998). In order to be true to our nature and the larger story of which we are a part — a story of God's good creation and our task — we need to perceive the caricature and the distortions embedded in the dominant story of reading instruction. We need to look past the wild claims and counter-claims with their simplistic solutions to see that Rudolph Flesch (*Why Johnny Can't Read*) was right in the 1950s when he claimed we were off track with our look-



say approach and we needed to redress an imbalance in reading instruction. We need to recognize that Ken Goodman and Frank Smith and the whole language of the '70s and '80s helped us see the hopeless inadequacy of the behavioristic explanations of reading and the profound truth that learning to read is about reading for meaning, that learning to read is deeply dependent on oral language, that literacy emerges from experiences with print at home and school, and that our overarching goal of reading instruction is persons who choose to read and who read discerningly.

Rightly understood in its complexity, the story is one where the phonics of the new millennium is completely different from the behavioristic phonics of the 1950s and 1960s, and one where direct instruction in decoding and comprehension is embedded in classrooms where there are many opportunities to read and write, creating excellent reading instruction which helps even those who are struggling.

The real story is one of progress and greater understanding, not progress without the missteps and misunderstandings that come with the Fall, but progress nonetheless. Understood this way, the story is one that inspires awe as we begin to fathom a little of the complexity of how the brain works at processing information in many different ways at once, and the amazing speed with which we learn to perceive and process the patterns of letters on the page. The story tells of our faithful response to our God in exploring and developing his creation, honoring the work of science in creating more powerful, accurate, and precise explanations of the nature of reading, and providing new insights about the ways in which learning to read can pose difficulties for some children.

The story also tells of our fidelity in limiting the claims of science when it

comes to answering the deeper questions about teaching and how teachers and children are meant to interact with one another. The teaching of reading is a story which, rightly understood, leads not to cynicism about new ways of teaching and an individualism in which we close ourselves off to learning from research and fellow teachers. Instead, it leads to humility, and discernment, and an openness to the communal enterprise of learning how

Good news:
disagreement about
how to teach
reading is waning.

best to help all of our students. The story of the last fifty years, for those who have eyes to see, reveals progress in understanding one of the remarkable gifts God has given us in language and reading and the importance of our task in understanding God's world.

The end in sight

But what do you as a Christian teacher do in the current situation, where the dominant North American education culture seems to be caught up in an ongoing argument? How do you perceive the true story? What do you do if you have heard and answered the call to become a Christian teacher and desire to be faithful in the task God has given you of helping children learn to read in ways that are harmonious with your Biblical principles? How do you escape from the vortex of the dominant story, the story characterized in the 1960s as "the great debate," in the 1980s as "the reading wars," and still in 2001 as "the

most divisive and disruptive topic in all of education" (Chall 1967; Stanovich 2000; Adams, 2001).

First of all let me offer a word of encouragement: the dominant metaphor of reading wars is waning. It is the beginning of the end to the confusion and disagreements about good ways to teach reading. Although the politicization of reading in the U. S. by the "No Child Left Behind" legislation is currently clouding the issue, over the next fifteen years we will experience more unanimity and coherence than we have seen for the last fifty.

And in the meantime let me suggest a few guidelines to help you steer a safe course through this heavily mined field and find your way to fulfilling your desire to be a faithful and effective reading teacher:

1. Recognize that reading instruction is *not* simple.

If we have learned anything from the past half century of debate and research about the teaching of reading, it is this: understanding reading is a very complex matter. In thinking about how we teach reading, we as Christians need always be wary of educational theories and movements which seek to reduce the complexities of teaching and who we are — students and teachers, responsive image bearers of God — to simple formulas. There are several layers of complexity in the teaching of reading. Understanding basic reading theory — how our eyes perceive letters and words and how our brain works to make sense of it so quickly — and understanding how children learn to read is just the start. You also have to deal with diversity of students you are teaching and the variety of backgrounds, abilities, and inclinations they bring to learning to read.

Run from anyone or any program which tries to convince you that there is a silver

bullet — one best way to teach reading — and that all the complexity of teaching reading can be reduced to a one size fits all method.

2. Commit yourself to helping your weaker readers.

We have also learned that the dominant patterns of teaching reading over the years have not been very helpful for the weak readers. If there were any part of my early years of teaching which I could do over, it would be just that — provide instruction that helps the students in my third grade and in my eighth grade classes who were struggling readers. Every teacher knows that in their classrooms there are students who struggle. At every grade level, in every classroom, there are students who are struggling to become proficient readers. At the root of our identity as Christians is our call to service, to help the helpless and help those who need us most. You need not look far to find students for whom it is critically important that you find a way to see them and to help them. While for many children learning to read comes easily, it is not so for all of them.

3. We need to bring balance in the teaching.

Balanced reading instruction is a popular and overused term right now, but it need not be just a slogan if we recognize several things. First of all, phonics is important, but it is not the full answer. Next, the phonics of the 50s is of very limited value; we need an active phonics instruction, one that helps children see the letter patterns in words and does not emphasize learning rules (Stahl, 1992). Finally, students need to spend a significant amount of time reading and writing if they are going to become good readers and writers.

One of my successes in leaving administration and college teaching to

return to the elementary classroom for a year was on this last point — keeping reading and writing at the center of my language arts instruction. I will never forget the powerful, emotional reaction of my junior high students to hearing *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* read aloud to them each day, or the satisfaction of hearing my students pleading to extend their independent reading time, or Philip seeking me out and asking me for my suggestions on what he should read next, or Jefta coming into school early in the morning to tell me how she just finished reading *The Giver* the night before and how she “would never see the world again in quite the same way.”

4. We need good teachers.

Frederick Buechner speaks of vocation as “the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” Good teachers, like my friend who teaches first grade, are persons who know that deep gladness and are committed to meeting the world’s deep hunger; they have a keen sense of calling. Good teachers are attuned to the story of progress and learning and are discerning and able to see through the excessive claims which are so prevalent in the teaching world. Reading research over the past forty years has borne out what we have always intuitively known: It is good teachers, not particular methods or materials, that are the key to students’ learning — teachers who are in tune with their students’ needs, committed to helping each of their students, dedicated to continued learning from the new research on reading, and seeking to be faithful and obedient in all they do.

References:

Adams, M. J., (2001). “Alphabetic anxiety and explicit, systematic phonics instruction: A cognitive science

perspective.” In S.B. Neuman and D.K. Dickinson (Eds.) *Handbook of early literacy research* (pp. 66-80) New York: Guilford Press.

Bosma, B., B. Blok (1992). *A Christian perspective on the teaching of reading*. Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin College Monograph.

Buechner, F. (1993). *Wishful thinking: A seeker’s ABC*. San Francisco: Harper, San Francisco.

Chall, J. (1967). *Learning to read: The great debate*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Kuyper, A. (1998). “Common Grace in science” from *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Lowry, L. (1994). *The giver*. New York: Bantam Doubleday.


O’Brien, C. (1971). *Mrs. Frisby and the rats of NIMH*. New York: Atheneum.

Pressley M. (2002). *Reading instruction that works: The case for balanced reading instruction*. New York: Guilford Press.

Snow, C., Burns, M., & Griffin, P. (Eds.) (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

Stahl, S. 1992. “Saying the ‘p’ word: Nine guidelines for exemplary phonics instruction.” *The Reading Teacher* 45:618-625.

Stahl, S. (2001). “Teaching phonics and phonological awareness.” In S.B. Neuman and D.K. Dickinson (Eds.) *Handbook of early literacy research* (pp. 333-347) New York: Guilford Press.

Stanovich, K. (2000). *Progress in understanding reading: Scientific foundations and new frontiers*. New York: Guilford Press. 

How Little We Understand of Truth and Love

by Donald T. Williams

Donald T. Williams (dtw@toccoafalls.edu) is a minister in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He currently serves as professor of English and director of the School of Arts and Sciences at Toccoa Falls College in the foothills of NE Georgia.

“Speaking the truth in love,” is a phrase we have come to parrot all too comfortably. If we truly understood it, we would realize that the Apostle’s exhortation in Ephesians 4:15 impales the contemporary church — and the Christian School movement that serves it — on the horns of a dilemma designed to make their dependence on their own strength and wisdom self-destruct. When we are thus impaled, we have the opportunity to discover how little we understand of either truth or love.

The truth in a fallen world is often harsh and always hostile to human pride. When human beings — even redeemed ones — try in their own wisdom to combine that truth with love, their natural tendency is to blunt the edges and soften the blows of this terrible two-edged sword. Thus is born theological liberalism and political correctness. But eschewing those betrayals of truth, some of us run the opposite way only to find ourselves not with Christ’s flock but with the cruel Pharisees. Thus is born legalism and self-righteousness. In neither case does truth or love really come through.

Not enough humility

As an example, take Jerry Falwell’s infamous attribution of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks to God’s judgment on America’s

tolerance of homosexuality, pornography, and abortion. As a factual statement, it may not be so far wrong as many would like to assume. Frustration with America’s decadence and its use of its media to disseminate what is perceived as moral filth is one of the explicit motivations that lie behind Islamic terrorism. Islamic

pointing tone not only hindered and obscured, it buried and even twisted the grains of truth that really were there in his pronouncement.

Truth as person

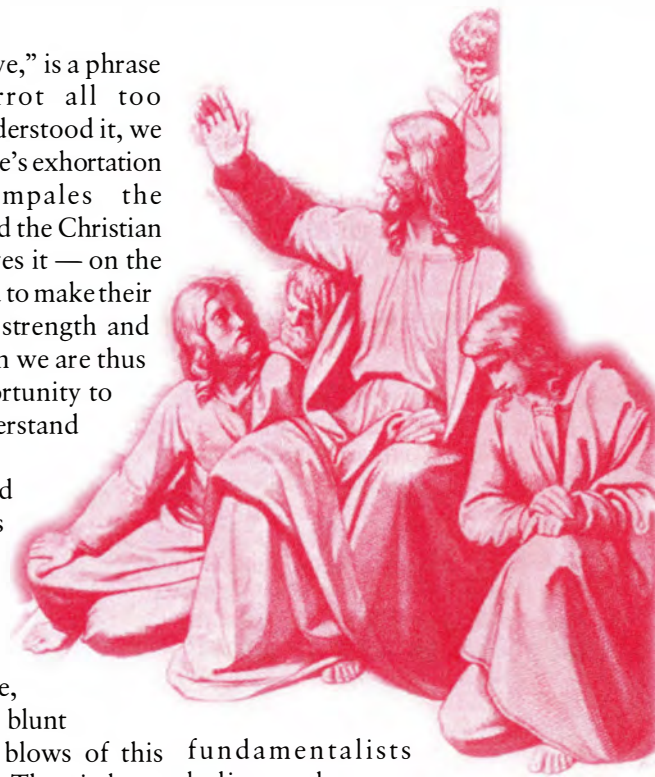
The problem is our failure to understand that truth is more than factual correctness; it is a Person, the eternal Logos, whose perspectives on those facts are essential to any truth that is whole and wholesome. And love is more than just being nice; it is a willingness to die for one’s enemies that flows, like truth itself, from only one place: that same Person.

Truth without love is truth distorted; it is ultimately deceptive. And love without truth is love perverted; it is ultimately destructive. This is so even when the truth is factually correct and the love emotionally sincere. Thus are vitiated all merely human attempts either to speak or to serve. Nevertheless, healing speech and true action become possible even for sinful human beings like us when — and only when — we are actively indwelt by the One who is both Logos and Love. Then, speaking the truth in love, we may indeed grow up in all aspects unto him who is the head, even Christ.

Reliable summary

So how does this apply to Christian education?

God is the God of truth. Therefore his Person is the ultimate source of truth, his Word the ultimate criterion of truth, his character the ultimate definition of the spirit of truth, and his will the ultimate guide to the use of truth. That is why truth, to be Truth, must be spoken in Love, and why any separation of either from the other destroys both. Both Truth and Love are equally expressions of his one and whole character. All this is revealed to human beings in his Son, whose portrait is



fundamentalists believe that our container of iniquity, like that of the Amorites, is full, and that therefore our destruction by Islam, like that of the Amorites by Israel in the Old Testament, is justified.

Had Falwell asked us to consider whether we might have given Islamic extremists more than a little excuse for holding this arrogant error, he might have performed a useful service. Instead, all that most people heard was anger, indignation, arrogance, and self-righteousness. The apparent absence of compassion in his finger-

definitively and authoritatively painted for them in the Bible, which prepares for, narrates, explains, and applies his coming into the world, his sacrifice, and his resurrection.

The Bible is not — though Christ is — the whole of truth. It does not contain the laws he wrote for the combustion of the stars, which had to be discovered by Physics. It does not contain many other things that are true because they are in the mind of God, things which lie dormant in the Book of his Works — Nature — to be discovered by Christian and pagan alike. They are nonetheless his truth for all of that. But if the Bible is not the whole of truth, it is the reliably perfect summary of and key to all of truth, for it was inspired by the Spirit to be, as Martin Luther said, “all about Christ only everywhere.” And Christ is the way, the truth, and the life.

Gathering the pieces

Truth then came once into the world whole in the person of her divine Master, Milton realized in “Areopagetica,” and was a perfect shape most glorious to see. “But when he ascended, and his apostles after him were laid asleep, then straight arose a wicked race of deceivers.” They hewed the lovely form of truth into a thousand pieces and scattered them to the four winds. But the friends of truth, “such as durst appear,” have been gathering them up and fitting them back together ever since, wherever they could find them. “We have not yet found them all,” Milton reminds us, “nor shall do, ‘till her Master’s Second Coming.”

With Scripture as their guide and key, then, Christian scholars should be those friends of truth best equipped to continue the search in the meantime. How tragic that so many believers prefer the comfort of the easy path and the closed mind. Nevertheless, right here in our Christian schools and colleges, many stalwart friends

of truth still dare to appear.

Paul’s agenda from Ephesians and Milton’s lines from “Areopagetica” should be the epigraphs to every lesson plan our teachers compose and to every research paper our students write for class or their teachers publish in learned journals. For

they mean nothing less than that teaching and the research that supports it are ways of loving Jesus and, thereby, loving each other. For every piece of the puzzle we can find — *every* piece — helps us more clearly to see him in all his glory and his fullness.



DO YOU WANT MORE THAN A DIPLOMA AND A RAISE?



Spend three weeks in July on our mountaintop campus with education professors who have years of experience in the integration of reformed faith and learning, as well as in the nuts and bolts of the teaching life. We offer programs for teachers and school administrators which lead to a Master of Education in just three summers. Come join our community of scholars.

Please call or e-mail for complete information.



Master of Education Program
COVENANT COLLEGE

Lookout Mountain, Georgia

(800) 677-3626 med@covenant.edu



About Power-hungry and Underpaid Teachers

Tena Siebenga-Valstar is a principal at Fort McMurray Christian School, 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. Tena Siebenga-Valstar, 168 Windsor Dr., Fort McMurray, Alta., T9H 4R2, or e-mail her at tvalstar@telus.net.

Jockeying for positions

Question # 1

How does one, as a Christian in a Christian School environment, deal with a colleague or colleagues who are power hungry and finagle their way into the administration's special good graces to get top positions at the expense of others?

Response:

My immediate response to your question is the biblical directive from Romans 12:2-8, where Paul speaks of discerning "what is the will of God — what is good, acceptable and perfect." He exhorts the believers as follows: "I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned." Our greatest desire should be that the will of our heavenly Father be accomplished in our schools. It should not be to give glory to a person or people, as his instruments, but to give glory to God.

In Philippians 2:3 we read, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interest, but to the interests of others." What follows is an encouragement to take on the mind of Christ, which was that of a servant, with the ultimate goal to give glory to God, the Father. In a situation such as this, each one on staff is encouraged to examine themselves in the light of Scripture.

Most of the Christian schools, with which I am acquainted, have an authority structure where the principal does not make personnel decisions on his or her own. Usually staff are made aware of possible openings in advance. Recommendations to the board for appointments are made only after an education committee's discussion about the candidates brings about a decision. As a colleague affected by this appointment, ask the principal about the process or policy for appointments to certain positions. If the policy of your school is that the principal is the only one that makes the decision, and there is no appeal process indicated in the policy, you have little recourse.

In my experience as a principal, I know that principals or

those in administration are privy to confidential information. This information, in the principal's judgment, may affect whether or not a person can fulfill the requirements for a position. The principal would be remiss if this information was revealed to the candidate's colleagues. Therefore, if due process has been followed, one has to accept the appointment, realizing that the decision making body has made the best choice given the information available.

If, however, there is a specific incident where you have been personally hurt by a colleague's finagling or power-hungry behavior, you have the responsibility to take this up with the person, in a one-on-one meeting. We read of this in Matthew 18:15,16.

In conclusion, I believe we have to examine each situation in light of Scripture, have policies in place for appointments to positions which are consistent with a Christian school's vision which seeks to give glory to God, and follow Matt. 18 if you have personally been affected and/or offended.

Getting a just wage

Question # 2:

Shouldn't Christian school teachers be paid well above the public school teachers and in that way show the "world" how highly Christ's body values Christ-centered education and its teachers?

Response:

That is a high and noble premise and in a world without sin, that could be a reality.

As Jesus was sending out his disciples to do their work he included the statement, "for the laborer deserves to be paid" (Luke 10: 7). Paul makes reference to that in 1 Timothy 5:18. In Deuteronomy 24:14, God's people were instructed, "You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy laborers.... You shall pay them wages daily before sunset, because they are poor and their livelihood depends on them; otherwise they might cry to the Lord against you, and you will incur guilt." Although we live in a different time and culture, it is clear that God expects those who work to receive a just wage.

When Paul addressed the divisions in the Corinthian church, he reminded the believers, "The one who plants and one who waters have a common purpose, each will receive wages according to the labor of each. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building" (I Corinthians 3: 8,9). As partners in Christian education we are working together with the



Tena Siebinga-Valstar
valstar@telusplanet.net

parent community and the non-parent school community for God who gives the growth in his Kingdom.

Many of those entering the teaching profession as Christian educators indicate that they have felt that this was their calling, some from early childhood. At that time wages were not an issue and for some wages will never be the issue. The reality and possible hardships of insufficient wages may not occur until the teacher and spouse are blessed with children. Some have learned to live within the boundary of their wages and yet there are others who, because of their circumstances, struggle to make ends meet. Christian teachers at day schools, colleges and universities, as well as pastors and missionaries often fall into the same category of wage restraints. They are paid less than those who have the same amount of education and experience and who are working in the secular world. Their benefit packages may not be as lucrative as well.

One of the realities we must face is that all of the previously mentioned professions receive their wages from the Christian community. The Christian community is not as large as the secular community and therefore the pool of resources is not as large. Many Christians who are paying to have their children educated in a Christian school are also paying taxes to the public system from which they do not gain a direct benefit. Many of these dedicated people are also likely the ones who are faithfully paying their tithe to the church and supporting other kingdom causes. If I look at the parents who send their children to our school, I know that few, if any, fall in the highest income brackets for our city.

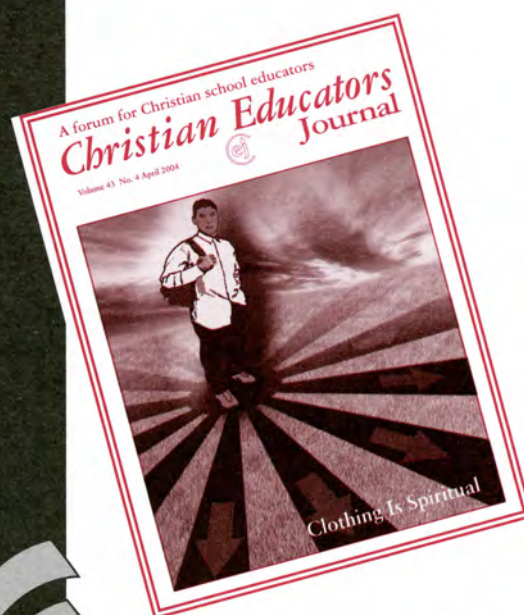
I have worked in a number of Christian schools. I am thankful that the salary study committee in each of these schools has considered the local public school wages as one of the criteria in their recommendations for the yearly salary. We will not likely match or exceed this standard, but it has been a goal to close the gap between the wages of public school teachers and Christian school teachers. Those responsible have tried to reach a "just" wage.

Personally, I believe it would be wonderful if our teachers could be paid the equivalent of the public school teachers in our city. I also know that if our board did so, our school would no longer be in existence. Parents would be unable to pay the resulting tuition. One of our teachers related a conversation she had with a parent. The parent was saying that she was so appreciative of the teacher and felt badly because the teachers were not paid more. Our teacher then related the benefits she receives in teaching in our school. Among these benefits were being free to speak about her faith, being one with the parents on the basis of discipline, having the same vision of education and just having a

job. For that she was very thankful. Many of her classmates from university did not have a job.

Having wages at or above the level of the public school teachers does not appear to be a reality for teachers in the independent parent-operated Christian schools, even though the parent community highly values Christ-centered education and Christian teachers. I believe there are other ways in which that appreciation can be expressed. Parents have to decide for themselves how they want to express that. I know that a note of thanks or just having a parent tell me that I have been appreciated means a lot to me as I continue in the work to which God has called me. I pray that all of us, as workers in God's kingdom, doing the job to which we have been called, can rest in the Lord, knowing that he will accomplish abundantly far more than we can ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20). ☺

Proud to be a part of the Christian Educators Journal.



CUSTOM PRINTERS

2801 Oak Industrial Dr. NE ■ Grand Rapids MI 49505
616-454-9224 ■ 800-315-9224 ■ Fax 616-454-1410
E-mail info@customprinters.com
www.customprinters.com

Book Reviews

Sam M. Intrator and Megan Scribner, editors, *Teaching with Fire: Poetry that Sustains the Courage to Teach*. Introduction by Parker Palmer and Tom Vander Ark. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 989 Market Street, San Francisco, 94103-1741, 2003. 231 pages, including various editorial notes and acknowledgments.

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

Teachers who did not receive this book for Christmas should not wait until the next holiday to contrive somehow to obtain a copy. In concept and execution — eighty-eight poems selected by as many teachers who comment on their choice — the book is designed to make teachers stand taller as they face the enormous responsibility of teaching and realize the influence they are having on the next generation of students. It did not escape my notice that Parker Palmer, author of *Courage to Teach*, was involved early in the planning. The support of the Center for Teacher Formation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation insured that the book would be done right.

The poems and the teachers' commentaries are, of course, the heart of the book. But the editorial comments, introductions, and final essay, "Tending the Fire: The Utility of Poetry in a Teacher's Life," are substantial discourses and indicate the seriousness with which all partners regarded their project.

Teaching moments

Consider the eight headings under which the poems are organized. They constitute a narrative of sorts, a chronicle of the rhythms of a teacher's profession. "Hearing the Call" speaks about the teacher's motivation for entering the teaching profession. "Cherishing the Work" describes "the irrepressible surge of joy that comes from a class well taught..." and the high calling of the field. "On the Edge" poems describe the sense of vulnerability that inevitably overtakes even the best teachers as they experience fears, guilt, and loneliness. "Holding On" expresses the encouragement and refreshment that poetry can provide. "In the Moment" challenges teachers to be constantly attentive to those magical moments in their classes when mystery, beauty, and wonder occur, often adventitiously. "Making Contact" furnishes poems which challenge teachers to surmount those institutional and cultural forces which can rob them of their vitality and, instead, to keep alive the aspirations and visions for themselves and their students. The poems in the section "The Fire of Teaching" demonstrate how poetry can get to the heart of big ideas with amazing immediacy, as language, metaphor, and poetic statement inspire and elicit passionate responses. Poems under "Daring to Lead" hold before teachers and students the imperatives of working for a more just, humane, and enlightened school system and society.

The point of this collection is that they were chosen by teachers — by teachers from all parts of the country and from various schools and grade levels. They chose poems which have contributed to their motivation as teachers, which have inspired them, encouraged them, and, at times, helped them retain their sanity. They have placed their poems on their desk, pasted them

in books, on business-size cards which they hand out to friends. Their commentaries report how their selection has helped them deal with grieving children, with matters of race, with children who were being abused ("I was watching them all/for the dark-circled eyes,/yesterday's crumpled costume, the marks/.the cuticles flaming and torn." From "Hotel Nights with my Mother," p. 65). They print poems on their agendas, provide courage to cope with irritating social and administrative pressures, and mischievously pass them around during meetings. But they also teach these poems, and discover how everybody can "get deep fast."

We need poetry

So, we have poems, and one-page commentaries. Many poems only indirectly relate to the child's school experience, but are useful in their general comment on life. Others leap at us from the classroom itself: "First Reader," by Billy Collins; "Children will Listen," by Stephen Sondheim; "Love in the Classroom," by Al Zolyna; "God has Pity on Kindergarten Children," by Yehuda Amichai; "Melissa Quits School," by Lucile Burt; "Two Kinds of Intelligence," by Jellaludin Rumi. Sometimes the poem influences children indirectly, as its idea lodges itself in the mind of the teacher. Teacher Penny Gill uses the poem "Diving into the Wreck," by Adrienne Rich, to remind her students (both the stable ones and those "stuck in deep pain,") that "they are engaged in the most important journey of all — to peer into the darkness and see who they are, where they have come from, and where they might choose to go carrying their own light and message."

The editors and teachers remind us that the world needs poetry — to refresh, to criticize, to help us laugh, to question, to help us see, to change our world for the better. As the last quotation suggests, however, sometimes a poem needs some management for the reader to get things right. Poetry, even though it may be, as Matthew Arnold said, the best that is thought and said in the world, should complement, not replace those resources of wisdom which reflect a steady transcendental stance. But wrestling with a serious poem — and writing one — constitutes pleasure of a high order.

The closing chapter, "Tending the Fire: The Utility of Poetry in a Teacher's Life" provides a series of observations about the practical effects of poetry and suggestions about acquiring a steady flow of useful poems. The editors recommend "a daily fix of poetry" and are kind enough to provide addresses for these web sites: Garrison Keillor's *The Writer's Almanac*: <http://www.writersalmanac.org/>. *Poetry Daily*, <http://www.poems.com/> Poetry 180: *A Poem a Day for American High Schools*: <http://www.loc.gov/poetry/180>. ☺

Stephen Ambrose, *Personal Reflections of a Historian*. New York: Simon & Schuster. 2002. 250 pages plus index. Notes by Steve J. Van Der Weele, Calvin College (Emeritus).

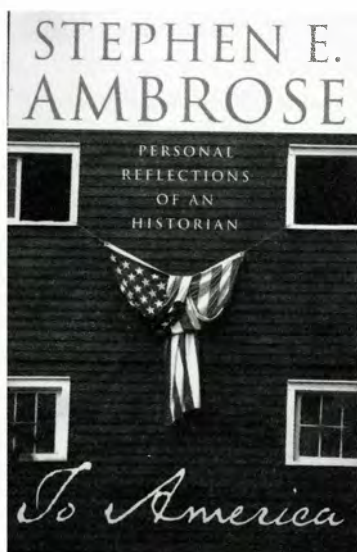


Steve J. Van Der Weele
svweele@calvin.edu

I would not wish to teach a course in American history without consulting the fresh approaches to topics and historical figures that Ambrose provides in this collection — largely reappraisals of conventional views. In several instances he feels obliged to correct his own teachers. His first essay, “Our Founding Fathers,” juxtaposes the merits and demerits of Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln. But the focus is on Jefferson, whom he faults for knowing that slavery is wrong but never making a move to abolish it. He judges that, according to his writings, Jefferson “had a great mind” but adds, “and a limited character” (3).

He takes the measure of Andrew Jackson, and, again, while faulting him for being a slave holder and for warring with the

Indians, nevertheless praises him for his leadership in the battle of New Orleans against the British and explains the importance of that campaign. He analyzes the nationalities of the crews who worked on the transcontinental railroad, noting that “no men ever worked harder under more dangerous conditions than those who built the UP and the CP” (45). He also summarizes how the route was chosen and how the enterprise was financed — and is sympathetic to the decisions. And to get some sense of the enormity of



the project, he and his son drove along the route, walked up to the bridges, examined the roadbeds, rode on the train — and was given the privilege of actually taking over the controls. With such personal details and responses, he makes history graphic and unforgettable. And he sets out to rehabilitate Ulysses S. Grant, the most popular American of the nineteenth century but one of the most vilified in the twentieth. That opinion came after World War I, when the world, sickened by the carnage of that colossal blunder, painted Grant with the same brush for supposed recklessness with men in the strategies he used to defeat Robert E. Lee and win the war for the Union. Ambrose admits that for a long time he duplicated his teachers’ castigation of the man who won the war but could not, apparently, win the peace. But discussing the Reconstruction period, he now concludes that Grant “tried to do more for the African Americans than any President until Lyndon Baines Johnson” (71).

Ambrose’s teachers taught him that Theodore Roosevelt was

America’s leading imperialist — and damned him for being so. A fresh look shows us a man of vision, a president who guided us into new directions — from conservation to government restraints on business, from a modernized armed force to changing the Pure Food and Drug Act. And he makes seasoned judgments about a wide variety of subjects he has studied, especially World War II, but also Vietnam, great Indians, his work on the Nixon biography, Racism, Women’s Rights, Immigration, and the National D-Day Museum — his vision for it and how he personally solicited the financing and brought it into being. It adds luster to what New Orleans already has to offer.

Ambrose is a great narrator of stories. He eschews political correctness, judges people in the light of their times and situation, and, though he writes with great love for his country, he expresses sadness that so many issues remain unresolved. It must have been a great experience to study under such a superb teacher. ☺

And Some More Reports

by Steve J. Van Der Weele

I love magazines and journals, and I subscribe to a lot of them. But I often sense that some important articles are getting away from me and that the ones I have before me may not be the right ones. Thus, to paraphrase Samuel Johnson, I work always to keep my periodicals in constant repair. And I am always relieved when two annual selections of essays appear: *The Best American Essays*, and *The Best Christian Writing* series. These have now made their appearance for the year 2003. The first, edited by Anne Fadiman, is published by Houghton Mifflin. The second (it uses 2004 rather than 2003 in its title), was edited by John Wilson and introduced by Miroslav Volf, in a splendid opening essay, and published by Jossey-Bass (see address above, with my review of *Teaching with Fire*).


“I am a man (human), and nothing is alien to me,” said the poet Terence. Each essay opens windows, but one soon finds one’s favorites. The Fadiman anthology includes several with relevance for teachers: “The Learning Curve,” by Atul Gawande, a surgeon; “Bumping into Mr. Ravioli,” by Adam Gopnik; “An Animal’s Place,” by Michael Pollan. The first of these describes how a surgeon learns his skills — always open to new methods, always confronting the unexpected, never altogether certain he gets it right. The Gopnik essay deals with child development — how the author’s child, though but three years old, creates his own world of fantasy, drawing on his observation of the adults around him. Michael Pollan provides a comprehensive assessment

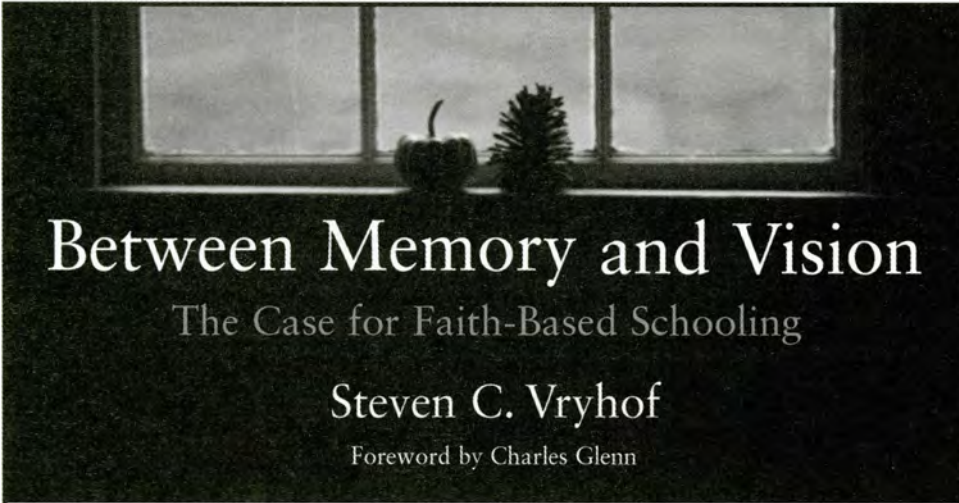
of the animal rights movements, and counter movements, and provides wisdom about our attitudes towards non-human life. Are they entitled to "rights" or merely welfare? He is no sentimentalist, no vegetarian, but does question the

industrialization of animals and supposes that, if people could see some of the conditions imposed on animals, we might want to endorse the practices of some farmers who are reverting to older methods of raising the animals who provide our food.

Another excellent essay is Elaine Scarry's "Citizenship in Emergency." She is concerned about whether we are responding correctly to the threats of terrorism, whether we should think more about local responses than institutional responses to dangers that may arise. She contrasts the measures the passengers took on Flight 93, which crashed in Pennsylvania, with the relative inaction on anyone's part in the other three suicide attacks on that fateful September 11. Things could have turned out differently if the passengers had been made aware of the other attacks and relied on themselves instead of Pentagon or airline officials. She broadens her discourse by contending that we have mistakenly ceded our abilities to defend ourselves "to a set of managers external to ourselves." As citizens we need to insist on a greater voice in defending our country.

The editors of the *Best Christian Writing* anthology, of course, have chosen essays more relevant to a Christian community. And these invariably reflect what one is less apt to find in the more secular essays — what Miroslav Volf calls "a space above the world," or, again, "a time to pursue non-contemporaneity." David Batsone, in his "Saving the Corporate Soul," laments the impersonality of corporate managers, and the cost to the corporations in loss of good will, reputation, and resentment in their limited concern for the bottom line. Kathleen Norris analyzes the pathology of reading as escape.

Philip Jenkins writes optimistically about the resurgence of religion in America. James Schaap recounts the dramatic action of the Massacre at Wounded Knee. The chapter "God and a Grateful Old Man," from Lewis Smedes's book *My God and I: A Spiritual Memoir*, ingratiates itself nicely into the collection. 



Between Memory and Vision

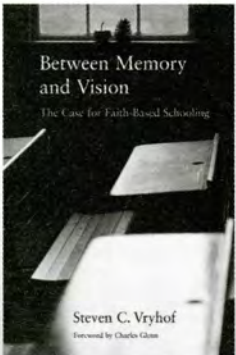
The Case for Faith-Based Schooling

Steven C. Vryhof

Foreword by Charles Glenn


While numerous studies have documented the educational achievements of Catholic schools, this book offers the first extended look at Protestant schools, providing insight into why these schools are especially effective not only in gaining the loyalty of parents but also as measured by objective national standards.

By closely examining a variety of Protestant schools, education expert Steven Vryhof uncovers the complexities, subtleties, and nuances of faith-based education that often elude those concerned only with producing higher test scores, a "moral environment," or a competitive workforce. Through candid interviews with parents of children in faith-based schools, Vryhof also answers questions that other interested parents may have about the benefits of faith-based education for their own children.



ISBN 0-8028-4932-6 • 197 pages • paperback • \$22.00

At your bookstore,
or call 800-253-7521
www.eerdmans.com

3076  **WM. B. EERDMANS**
PUBLISHING CO.
255 JEFFERSON AVE. S.E. / GRAND RAPIDS, MI 49503