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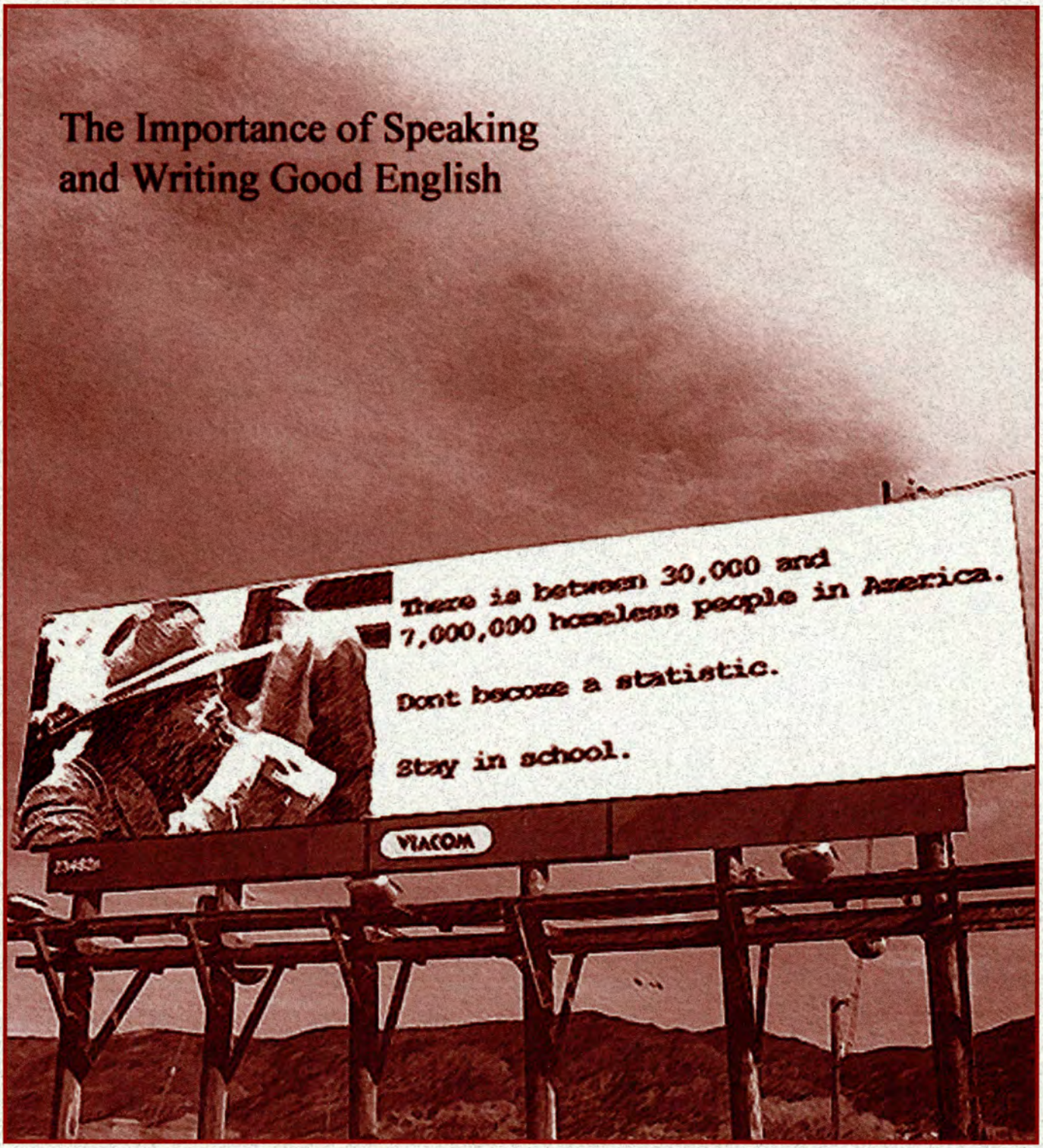

Editorial


Bert Witvoet

Praising God Through Language: Our First Duty

Most articles that promote a good use of language either assume or state functional reasons such as: "You need to speak and write good English to get ahead in this world." There are plenty of functional reasons for communicating well. Perhaps you teachers appeal to them when you come across poor writing in your class assignments. I can hear you say, "You will have a difficult time making it at university or getting a job if you make too many mistakes or express yourselves poorly." It's true that almost all office and service industry jobs require good communication skills. In order to make a public presentation or write reports, you have to demonstrate competency and a good command of the language.

Open channels

Good relationships also demand good communication, by the way. Teachers can make a convincing case by pointing out how good speaking and writing habits benefit friendships and marriages. Good communication provides clarity. I could occasionally have avoided a tiff with my wife, for example, had I expressed myself more clearly. Too often I rely on pronouns without making the antecedent clear so that she loses the thread of the story. "*Who* said that?" "Well, *John*, of course." "You didn't *say* that."

Poor communication can result in not following orders correctly. Suppose a farmer tells his farmhand, "Milk only the cows," or "Only milk the cows." The first command may imply that the farmer himself will milk the goats, and the second, that the farmer himself will *feed* the cows. Alright, I admit, this example is a bit farfetched, especially for city slickers, but it's the best I could come up with on a sultry summer morning. The frequent misplacement of "only" is often more of an annoyance to purists than a source of confusion in the mind of the listener or reader. Still, if I had a penny for every time an employer gave unclear directions to his worker, and that unclear direction resulted in wrong and costly action, I would by now be a well-heeled retired editor. It pays to speak and write correctly. This issue's front-page illustration humorously drives the point home.

Open to beauty

But there are other reasons for using correct English. I would cite esthetic reasons for starters. God created us to be lovers of beauty. It's a direct result of the fall that we don't see and acknowledge all the beauty that God has displayed in our world. This can carry over into our writing and speaking. We should take pleasure in language that communicates well and that pleases at the same time.

Playfulness in the use of language is important, too, because by resorting to elusive images we recognize that language is both powerful and limited. Since several layers of meaning can lodge in our dicscourse, we need to tease these meanings out by using metaphors and other rhetorical devices. But at the same time, by using them we acknowledge that there are things that go beyond our ability to explain. When Carl Sandburg prays his "Prayers of Steel" the reader vicariously experiences his love for the throbbing city and its wonders of human engineering.

> Lay me on an anvil, O God.
> Beat and hammer me into a crowbar.
> Let me pry loose old walls.
> Let me lift and loosen old foundations.
> Lay me on an anvil, O God.
> Beat me and hammer me into a steel spike.
> Drive me into the girders that hold a skyscraper together.
> Take red-hot rivets and fasten me into the central girders.
> Let me be the great nail holding a skyscraper
> through blue nights into white stars.

The imagery suggests Sandburg's preference and admiration for the strength and boldness of his new world. His poem is a concise and wonderfully complex piece of communication. At the same time, it cannot tell us what Sandburg was really thinking and feeling. I have a hard time getting into Sandburg's skin anyway, more accustomed as I am to waxing romantic about trees and birds. I definitely would never pray to be a nail in a skyscraper even if the language is metaphorical.

Imperfect vehicle

Verbal communication always falls short of representing the full scope of an experience. Painters, who engage in visual communication, understand this failing even more acutely. Stephen Lewis, special UN envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa and one of the most articulate public figures I know, certainly in Canada, told an audience about the incredible suffering in Africa caused by the spread of AIDS. He eloquently described child-led families in sub-Saharan Africa, in situations where the parents had died and where children, sometimes only eight years old, became the head of a family. He was able to communicate a lot through personal anecdotes, but even he admitted that, although he loves the power of language, he was not able to find words that described what he saw and felt.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson was right when he wrote: "For words, like Nature, half reveal/ And half conceal the Soul within" ("In

Memoriam"). That's how we differ from God, whose words *create* the "soul within." Somehow, we can never capture the essence of an experience in our use of language, but we must try to come close. And the more we know about diction and sentence structure, the better we can communicate to those around us.

Good communication is very important. Deaf people often comment that they would rather be blind than deaf. Being deaf, they are cut off more than if they were blind. They feel more isolated. The same goes for recent immigrants who don't know the language of their new country. That can be a very lonely experience and it can make them feel powerless. To be able to speak and write well is an amazing gift to people who want to belong to a community.

Our filial duty

But the most important reason for speaking and writing well has to be that we are called to respond to our heavenly Father's Word with our best offering of words. In Hayden's oratorio *Creation*, Adam and Eve burst out in praise right after they have been created: "This world, so great, so wonderful, thy mighty hand has framed.... Resound the praise of God our Lord." Angel voices join them in their song of praise. When the last strains of "We praise thee now and evermore" die away, Adam sings, rather prosaically, "Our duty we have now performed in offering up to God our thanks." In the German original he says, "Our *first* duty we have now performed."

To praise God is our first duty as human beings. The Westminster Catechism echoes this sentiment in its answer to the first question: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever." One way of responding to that confession is to promote beautiful and clear language. We owe it to God and to each other that we speak clearly and communicate appropriately. It ennobles us and glorifies him. Such an approach stands in direct opposition to an attitude of carelessness prevalent in many student essays and newspaper accounts. Recent trends in e-mail correspondence also show that letter writers are becoming too blasé about style and structure. Capitalization, punctuation and spelling go by the board because of the high-speed nature of emails. It is the mark of a fast society that it becomes careless.

I feel like taking on an apostolic tone in this editorial: "It is even reported that there is grammatical unfaithfulness among you, Christian school teachers, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans. Dangling participles cohabit with split infinitives. Pronouns are put up for adoption by antecedents. Don't you know that a little disagreement between subject and verb works through the whole dough of composition? Fellow educators, this ought not to be so!"

Enough of this preachy stuff. Let me conclude by reiterating that there are functional, esthetic and religious reasons for paying close attention to the way we speak and write. We must of course, always speak truth. That's a content issue. But we can enhance the impact of truth by delivering it in language that is pleasing, correct and lovely. Let style bring out the beauty of truth.

Followers of Christ should display an attitude of caring. We care about the creation. We care about how we express ourselves in language. Let's as Christian educators keep high the standards for speaking and writing in all disciplines.

Bert Witvoet

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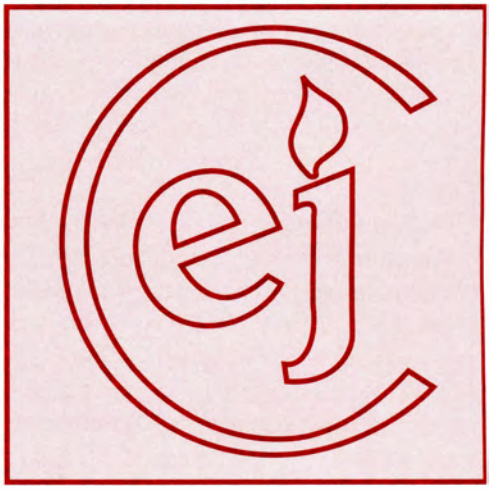

Using Language Well Is Mandatory

by Agnes Fisher

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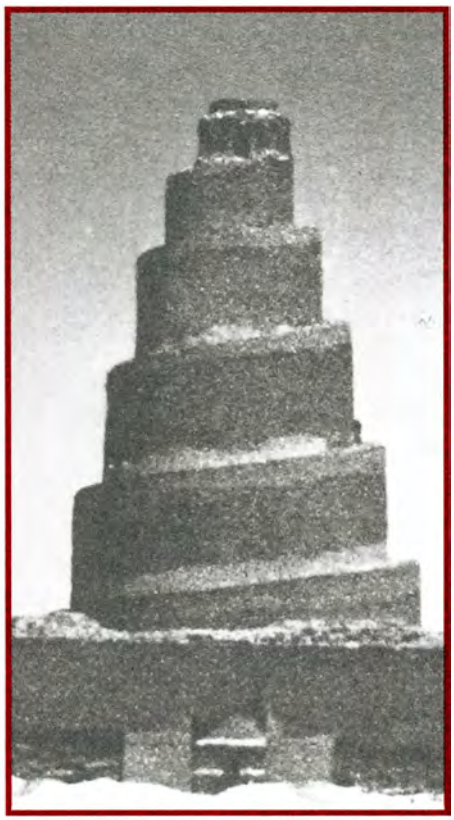


Language comes from God. It is given to his image-bearers. Animals do not have language although there are some who would argue that they do. Language is a gift. It is a perfect gift which has taken a tumble along with the rest of the fallen creation. The clearest evidence of that can be found in the story of the Tower of Babel when the builders' arrogance called down divine judgment in the form of confusion of speech. Language has been misused and abused ever since. Why are so many in our culture unable to use it well?

Bill Cosby has been doing quite a job, according to the media, castigating the African- American community for its lack of ability to communicate well. As Christian teachers shouldn't we also be concerned about good use of English like Dr. Cosby is? What is our task as teachers? We may even ask, why all the fuss and bother about who has got it right and who does not? Is the trouble to correct the wrong worth it?

The Bible may have to serve as a standard here. It is referred to as the Word. It is that special revelation that reveals the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. We cannot know about salvation without it. It all had to be written down first. And it had to be written well by the best writers. The written word from God is that important. As a standard, we would do well to emulate it; it is important to "get it right."

Unpredictable change

One major problem that surfaces immediately as we try to get it right is that language is not static. It is a "living" growing and changing entity. New words come into a given language through immigration, travel and even advertising. New spellings are invented and eventually accepted. This is a constant thorn in the side of those purists who would monitor their society's language in order to control the flow according to their concept of perfection. (The French are notorious for this!) Because of the changing nature of societies and cultures, the spoken and written word will change, too.

Having said that, what must we do to make sure communication works well? The obvious answer is that some standard of correctness and proper usage ought to be in place and taught. After all, if we all write and speak using our own creative form of English, we will end up talking and writing past one another. We end up creating chaos. Communication on any meaningful level could not occur. If we all just threw words around as Jackson Pollack threw paint around we'd have specks of words here and there without coherence and with little if any communication.

Constant grammar

Since language is the prime tool of communication, what must teachers do to lead students to a successful and even profound and artistic use of such a tool? I would first of all suggest that some form of grammar needs to be addressed in a kind of sequence that makes sense for various learning styles and levels.

Grammar lessons have been many and varied. Diagramming sentences did not work for all involved, only for a few. The "whole language" approach worked, if at all, for only a very few. Since rigid exercises ten times a week make most students gag, we want to stay clear of that. Well, then, let's throw up our hands in despair and move on to math, or, better yet, art.

No! We really must work at getting entire faculties on all levels to expect the best from all students in their use of language. Perhaps the best method is to incorporate the grammar lessons within all other lessons. Never apologize for teaching grammar. (Read Mary Rackham's article, "Why Grammar" DLTK~lods/articles/why grammar.htm). Let no subject be free from opportunities to teach the proper use of language.

Check progress

Use the best methods you can invent or discover to reach your students in their writing and speaking on whatever level they may be at any given time. If one lesson doesn't work, throw it out and find or create a better one. Some students learn better through memorization; let them memorize. There are plenty of grammar rules to commit to memory. Some learn through reading; let them read. Some learn through innate talent; let them tutor others. Have students write, and write often. Begin

by letting students write just short pieces, perhaps one sentence at a time, then two strung together, and so on. Then allow them to rewrite, revise, and rewrite until they get it right. Don't settle for correctness only. Keep track through portfolios. Students often find when reviewing their portfolios that they are surprised by their own writing, even short weeks after something has been done. They learn from each other, from teachers, but even more, they learn from themselves.

It is also important to be an example. Teachers on all levels and in every subject should be the standard setters for proper use of English. In our speaking and writing, we should be aware of our own words, sentences and grammar. Say it right! Write it right! Be examples.

Have some kind of standard in place for grading writing which can be used by teachers in all subjects. Science reports must conform to the same writing rubric and style sheet (MLA) as English papers. Math word problems and answers must conform, as must the music report. Set a standard. Develop a booklet on style and correctness and put it in the hands of the entire faculty. And make it stick!

Excellence in communication is of the greatest importance. After all, being able to use language well enables one to think well. Functioning well as members of God's kingdom requires excellence in the use of the gifts he has given.

Communication Questions in a New Age

Communication in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has taken on a whole new set of clothes. Writing letters is nearly a lost art, having been taken over by e-mail and instant messaging. Preachers and politicians, without blinking an eye, resort to dangling participles, non-parallel structure and lack of agreement either in tense or number. One brief example is the sentence I heard recently coming from the pulpit: "While growing up in British Columbia, the Canadian [something or other] company [did this or that]." The person was doing the growing but the company was actually the subject. The fact that some phrases and clauses are not connected is hardly recognized by speaker, writer or audience. Performing bravely in this grammatical circus is the apologetic which begins with "If people know what I'm saying (writing) what's the difference?" Perhaps, on some level, this is a valid question. It brings us to many other questions as well.

What is the difference? Why bother teaching grammar if communication takes place without that knowledge? Why teach writing in any particular form when so few people write? Professors, lawyers, journalists and some teachers *have* to write so why not offer specific writing courses for them? Why not teach a course in the jargon of law, and one in the jargon of higher education, and one in the jargon of science and medicine? Why teach basic composition to freshmen if they plan to major in Physical Education, Art or Mathematics?

Isn't it a futile effort as well as a waste of both time and money to insist on basic communication skills? Haven't we all been communicating since we were toddlers, without the benefit of structured classes? Even Shakespeare penned his first folios with no apparent regard for spelling, sentence structure or length. Who would argue that he did not communicate? Why should English teachers (a bunch of elitists anyway) continue to butt their heads against stone walls in the ongoing struggle to teach students how to write, speak, communicate according to the rules? Who set up these rules anyway? Isn't the use of modern technology more important "than getting it right" on paper? Shouldn't we, as educators, be much more concerned with teaching computer skills than with grammar, composition, term papers and essays?

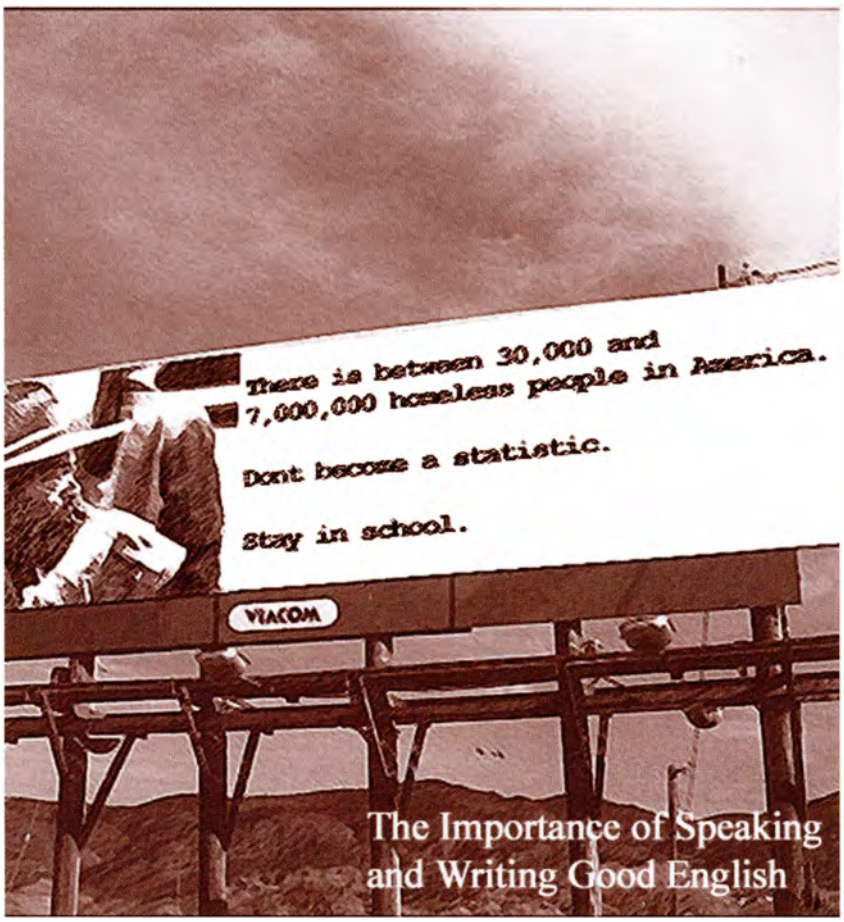
I intend these questions, obviously, as rhetorical questions. If they are not so understood, they will automatically elicit a "because...." There are those in educational circles who would answer a resounding "no" to many of them. (Read some of Neil Postman's books, especially *The End of Education*). The point is that since we do live in an age overshadowed by technology, we as educators need all the more to address such questions. They need to be asked, and who better to ask them than those who must eventually answer them?

Agnes Fisher

Notes on Correct English

by John Derbyshire

John Derbyshire (olimu@optonline.net) is a contributing editor at the National Review, *a critic, commentator and novelist, living on Long Island, New York. He has just released a brand new book,* Prime Obsession: Bernhard Riemann & the Greatest Unsolved Problem in Mathematics. *In this book he makes higher level mathematics interesting to the layman. We reprint the following random notes on correct English with his permission*



Like anyone else who writes for the public, I get a lot of letters and emails from readers complaining about errors of grammar, usage or fact. Some of these are justified; some are well-intentioned but wrong-headed; some are plain silly.

On this page I shall put my responses to some of the commoner complaints.

Who, whom.

(A famous remark of Lenin's by the way. It transliterates from Russian as *kto, kogo?* but is actually pronounced more like: "ktaw, kaVAW?" A perfect encapsulation of the left-wing mindset. Who is the oppressor, who the oppressed? Who is doing what to whom? Lefties believe that wherever two or more human beings are gathered together, one group must be beating up on another group... But that's not what I'm talking about here.) Generally speaking, I go with the slogan I once saw on a lapel button: "I FAVOR WHOM'S DOOM". I think "whom" is a relic, and the sooner we get rid of it, the better. "Who" is the natural pronoun in almost all circumstances, as Steven Pinker points out in *The Language Instinct*. However, I was educated by old-school prescriptive grammarians, and still say "whom" sometimes from sheer habit, or when I know for sure that an editor will change a "who" to a "whom" anyway. Remember the old vaudeville favorite: "Who Were You With Last Night?"

Will, shall

"Shall" is very fast going the way of "whom." I am not quite so willing to say "good riddance" in this case as I am with "whom," because a subtle and useful shade of meaning is being lost here, and because when it *has* finally been lost, English literature from past times will be read with less understanding. However, there is no doubt that "shall" and "should" can now, in all but a small number of artificial constructions, pretty much be dispensed with in spoken American English. This is not news: H.L. Mencken in *The American Language* (1949) said that "except in the most painstaking and artificial varieties of American" the distinction between *shall/should* and *will/would* may almost be said to have ceased to exist." There is a large literature on this, which you can read for yourself. Not only Mencken, but also Follett (*Modern American Usage*) and Fowler (*Modern English Usage*) give over acres of space to it.

Here I am only going to apologize — or rather, decline to apologize — for my own inconsistency. Those same teachers who hammered "whom" into my infant head also taught me the *shall/will* rules, and some of what they taught stuck. I hear myself say: "I should be sorry to see...," "They shan't trick me..." and similar

things, naturally and unselfconsciously, at least to the point where my American listeners break out in smiles. If you can't be bothered to read Fowler, Follett, Mencken etc. (and if you can't, I don't blame you), the root difference between "shall" and "will" is that the first carries a flavor of obligation, the second a flavor of volition.

My schoolmasters used to tell us the story of two drowning men. The first had fallen into the river accidentally and was struggling for his life. "I shall drown!" he cried out in desperation. "Nobody will save me!" The second, however, was a suicide, determined to quit this life. He deliberately threw himself into the most treacherous part of the current, and as he went down for the third time was heard to shout: "I will drown! Nobody shall save me!" That only scratches the surface, though, as you will see if you read Follett etc., early-21st-century Americans have clearly decided that they have better things to do with their time than memorize pettifogging distinctions of this kind, and on balance, with the slight reservation entered in my first sentence, I think they are wise to have done so.

For some reason, mixing these two up is one of the worst crimes a writer can commit. It drives people crazy. I am a chronic confuser of the two, and shall probably continue to be until some enraged grammarian comes round with a shotgun and blows my head off. I am sorry. This is a blanket apology, to which in future I shall refer all complainers.

Dirty tricks

A few weeks ago I wrote a column titled "Less Guns, More Gun Crime." That brought out the language nuts in droves. In a subsequent column I said "Phooey!" to the lot of them and posted the following rebuttal at the top of that column when I reproduced it for my personal web site:

I got approximately 875,000 emails from readers telling me that this piece should have been titled: "Fewer Guns, More Gun Crime." I understand that they meant well; and, given the current state of the language (Am I the last person in the civilized world who knows that "criteria" is a plural noun, or is there someone else? Hello?) I am in general sympathy with their feelings. Furthermore, I do make grammatical bloopers, sometimes very horrible ones; and these lapses occasionally even get past the gimlet-eyed editors of *National Review*. In a magazine piece on the Crusades a few weeks prior to this, I wrote "whence" when I should have written "whither," and this *faux pas* actually made it into print. When gross errors like that are pointed out to me, first I cringe, then I offer snivelling apologies. OK?

Now: Permit me to give a wee lesson in rhetoric. It is *perfectly all right* to deliberately mangle usage, grammar, and even spelling to make a stylistic or rhetorical point. It is, in fact, so all right that rhetoricians have fancy names for these dark arts. The substitution of one grammatical form for another is "enallage": "But see where Somerset and Clarence comes!" (Henry VI Part 3, 4.2.3 — just to ram the point home, all my examples will be taken from the Swan of Avon). The substitution of one part of speech for another is "anthimeria": "Such stuff as madmen tongue and brain not." (Cymbeline, 5.4.146). Substitution of the wrong noun or adjective for effect is "catachresis": "Look with thine ears." (King Lear, 4.6.154). Insertion of superfluous words for euphony or reinforcement is "pleonasm": "When that I was and a little tiny boy." (Twelfth Night, 5.1.398). There are a dozen others, but I hope these are sufficient to make the point. English is not a computer code, in which the slightest deviation from prescribed rules brings down the system. It is a live thing, a thing that wants to be teased and played with, as all the great masters knew. I hereby declare my intention to follow their example, to the best of my meager abilities: "With little risk of being misunderstood, but with much risk of being thought illiterate." (That is from Arthur Quinn's invaluable handbook to English rhetoric, *Figures of Speech*, from which all the above examples were lifted.) Got all that?

Now: "Less Guns, More Gun Crime" was a deliberate play on the title of John Lott's well-known book, *More Guns, Less Crime*, which I mentioned further down the piece. Deliberate, and perfectly legitimate; unless you want to argue with Bill Shakespeare — or with Joe Jacobs, whose memorable (though I grant you, in his case probably unintentional) enallage "We was robbed!" probably expresses the feelings of any of my would-be correctors who have read this note.

How Important Is Correct English Usage?

A retired IBM plant manager, who attended the final Web Site Presentations for a class on E-Commerce Web Design at Marquette University, sent the following e-mail letter to Dr. George F. Corliss.

Friday, June 28, 1996

Thank you for inviting me to the presentations, George.... I enjoyed seeing the work of the students, and it was evident that they had invested quite a bit of time and effort in their projects. This makes my earlier comments to you even more appropriate, since a lot of that effort can be nullified by the negative impact of sloppiness or just bad spelling and grammar.

I'm sure you highlight the need for accuracy in your WWW seminar, but I would put it in even stronger terms: in this day and age it is INEXCUSABLE to have obvious misspellings, ugly typos and bad grammar on Web sites (or in any publication, for that matter). This is even more serious when the "publicized" institution is a reputable university. It conveys an impression not only of low language standards but also one of "who cares?", given that spelling and grammar checkers are available to anybody with a computer. But they should be complemented by a good "live" proof reader to catch those instances where "dumb" checkers are fooled.

Every one of the presentations I attended yesterday showed — to a greater or lesser degree — examples of sloppy proofreading. Titles and headings deserve special attention because mistakes in them stand out like flashing neon lights. Parents of prospective students — and even some of the high school students themselves — may be "instantly turned off" by some of the glaring misspellings on Web pages designed to attract them.

Please forgive my emphasis on this subject, but I've been fighting a crusade for years to counteract the common view that "engineer's can't write" (motto: "I are an engineer"), unfortunately with not much success. I've even thought of developing a course on "Writing Principals for Principle Investigators." You wouldn't believe the horror stories I encountered at IBM (programmers SURELY can't write!), inventors of the verb "to solution".

Regards,

Horace A. Mendez Castro

All the Grammar I Ever Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten
or Pride and Punctuation

by Jan Kaarsvlam

After leaving the teaching profession for an unsuccessful summer stint as a plumber (which gave new meaning to the term "sunken living room"), Jan Kaarsvlam has decided to return to his former calling. He will be teaching yak-breeding as part of the new agricultural program at Yimbal-Addison Community College (YACC) in Yimbal, Nebraska; but anticipates a call from Calvin, Trinity, Dordt, Redeemer, or any other institution with a Reformed approach to alpaca-breeding at any time.

Gord Winkle's meaty hand clutched a wrinkled, slightly Cheeto-stained collection of student assignments that he was waving demonstratively at Christina Lopez. The work on the paper was the students'; the cheeto stains were Winkle's.

"Don't you teach these kids anything in your department?" Winkle demanded. His face wore a smile, but the tone of his voice implied a real frustration with his colleagues in the English department. "These kids couldn't punctuate their way out of a paper bag."

"You're mixing metaphors again," Lopez said. Winkle snorted. Lopez sighed. "Let me see the papers," she said.

Winkle thrust them across the table at her. She gingerly grabbed at one corner of the stack, her nose wrinkling in distaste at the orange smudges. She set the papers down and used the eraser of her pencil to rifle through the stack. Winkle was right. The work was deplorable. Sentence fragments, comma splices, misspellings galore, and a consistent misuse of homophones.

She noticed something else, too. "Gordon, you gave most of these poorly-punctuated essays *A*'s!"

Winkle wasn't paying attention. He had noticed a huge box of homemade powdered-sugar doughnuts set out on the lounge table with a sign "Congradulations too our new Bible teacher Mr. Boaz and his wife on the birth of to grandbaby's in one weak!" He pivoted his chair sideways and kicked off with both feet as hard as he could. His chair glided on its rollers noisily down the length of the table, coming to rest just in front of the donuts.

"Of course I gave them A's," he said as he grabbed two donuts from the box. "They did really good work. Knew all the answers to the architectural details unit we just finished."

Lopez sighed. As department chair, she had made this point numerous times at curriculum committee and faculty in-services, and yet it never seemed to sink in. "Listen," she said, "if you expect kids to write and speak English clearly in your classroom, you have to demand it of them. If a student writes a history paper for me and says that President Chet Arthur led us gleefully into WWII or that Columbus discovered Spain in 1621, I mark them down for those errors. Or if one of your students did a research paper from me on architectural elements and confused a gothic arch with a roman arch, I would mark them down. As a result, students try to avoid such errors."

Winkle stared at her blankly, his mouth working the remains of his two donuts slowly. He looked like a cow chewing its cud. Finally he forced himself to swallow, took a slug of coffee, and answered, "So?"

"So you need to do the same thing!" Lopez was losing patience. "If you don't want to see all these composition errors, mark students down for them. Right now you are sending the message that such errors really aren't important because you don't take off points for them. Instead, you come in here and yell at me!"

Before Winkle could reply, Maxwell Prentiss-Hall entered the lounge. He was dressed in a silk shirt and black leather pants, a disturbing change in wardrobe he had acquired over the summer while studying for two months at the University of Berlin. Nor was that the only disturbing change. He had left the States with his slight Louisiana drawl, but he had returned with a perfectly horrible attempt at an Oxford English accent.

"Cheerio, chaps! Top o' the marnin' to ye." Prentiss-Hall winked at them both. Lopez was concerned. Maxwell had never shown a tendency to wink before. The newly-compromised European counselor picked up a donut and continued. "I say, couldn't help but overhear the ruddy smashing conversation you blokes were having. Thought I'd put in my two pence, wot?"

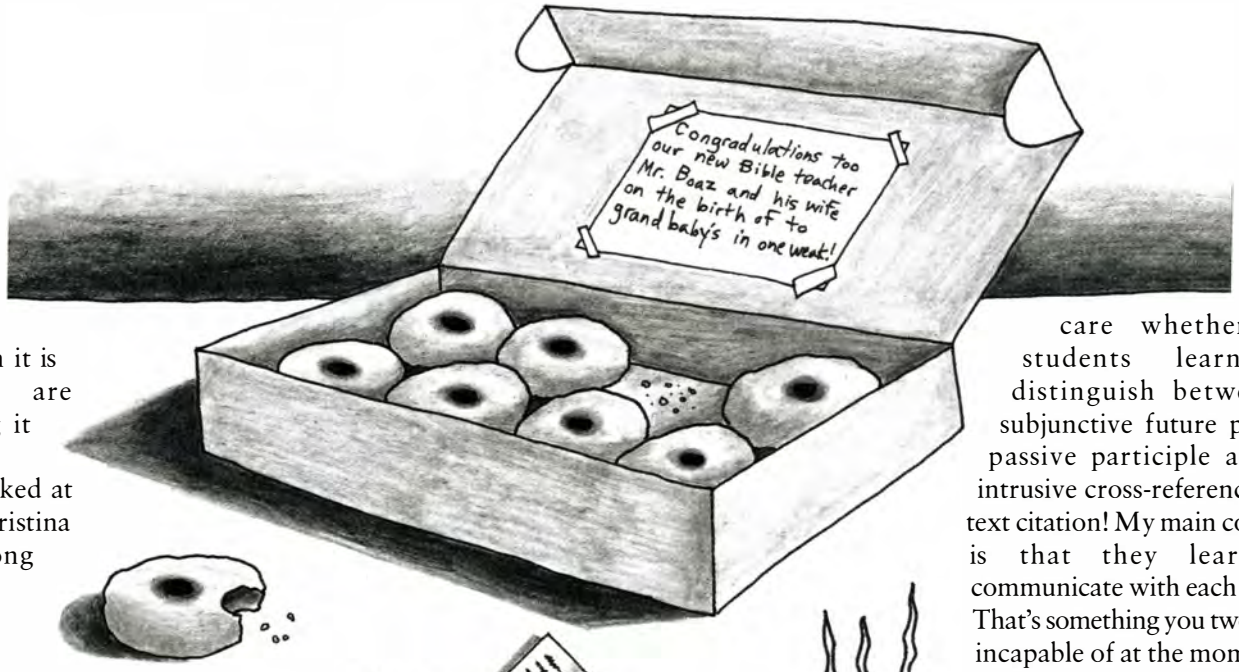
Winkle snorted. "What is *wot* supposed to mean? And what's with you lately, Maxy? It is getting so I can't understand you — course, now that I think about it, you've always been a little confusing."

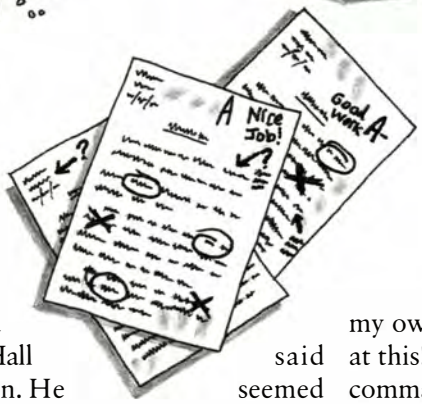
"*Wot* means *what*, wot? And I don't notice anything different, *jenne se qua*? Now, back to the matter at hand, eh, wot? I overheard your discussion about the problems our students are having with the King's English, and I thought I'd mention a trick or two I picked up on the other side of the pond, wot? After all, knowing the *le mot juste* is like being able to determine what the *soup de jour* of the day is when you read a menu, you know? "

Christina Lopez couldn't take it any more. She exploded out of her seat. "You people are supposed to be role models. And this school is supposed to be a place of unified philosophy and mission. We are supposed to be colleagues who support each other. But instead…" She pointed a finger at Winkle. "Look at you. You mumble when you talk, you don't care about proper punctuation, you don't hold up any standards at all. You talk with your mouth

full, and then, THEN, YOU have the GALL to complain that I am not doing my job, when it is you who are undermining it day by day!"

Winkle looked at the floor. Christina took in a long breath, then turned to Prentiss-Hall. "AND YOU! What kind of a pretentious continental twit are you trying to be? What kind of moron studies for two months in Germany and comes back with a supposedly British accent?"





"Oxford English is the preferred dialect on the continent," Prentiss-Hall said defensively as he set his donut down. He seemed to be wilting inside his leather pants. "Europeans learning a second-language believe it the most precise and affecting version of the language."

"Oh, shut up," Lopez demanded. "You are as bad as Winkle. He has no standards, and you, you have ridiculous ones. An Oxford dialect is no better than any other. If you want students to learn proper English, then review what we use language for. It isn't a matter of trying to impress people with big words, or French phrases, it is simply a matter of communicating. I don't care whether my students learn to distinguish between a subjunctive future perfect passive participle and an intrusive cross-referenced in-text citation! My main concern is that they learn to communicate with each other! That's something you two seem incapable of at the moment."

Lopez grabbed her grade book and headed for the door. On the way she threw her hand at the sign for the doughnut box. "And how am I supposed to teach students proper writing skills when my own colleagues can't master spelling or punctuation? Look at this! Three spelling errors and an apostrophe error, missing commas...." She ended her outburst with an inarticulate cry of rage, then calmly left the room.

Winkle, a dusting of powdered sugar still coating his lips, watched her go. Then he turned to Prentiss-Hall.

"Say, Maxie, how's about you donate your donut to me today?"

Max looked at Winkle, and shook his head with a smile, and slid the donut toward his colleague. "It'd be a bloody waste to throw it out, now, wouldn't it? I was more in the mood for kippers and bangers anyways, wot?"

Thank You, Ron!

The CEJ Board of Trustees would like to thank Ron Sjoerdsma for serving as Chair of the Board for the past six years. Ron resigned from this position in the spring of 2004 so that he could devote more time to his numerous other commitments. In addition to serving as Chairperson for the Board, Ron also served for several years as a regular columnist for the Journal *as author of Tech Talk. The Board wishes to express its appreciation for all the time and effort Ron gave to ensure the smooth functioning of the* Journal. *We will miss his many contributions and wish him the best for his future endeavors.*

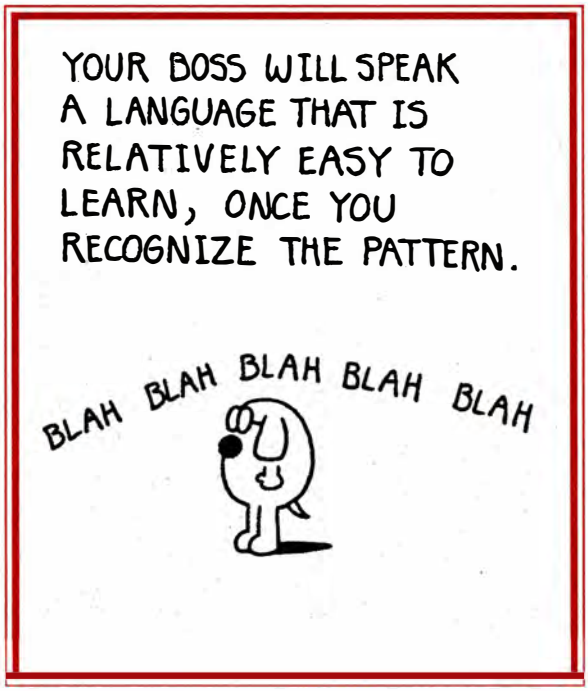
Respect for the Word

by Steve Van Der Weele

Steve J. Van Der Weele is emeritus professor of English at Calvin College. (He was the first college English teacher the editor of CEJ encountered on his way from an immigrant's limited usage of the language to an M.A. in English.) Steve writes book reviews for CEJ and is also its final proofreader.

A friend with children in school complained to me recently that one of the teachers tells her students that learning to distinguish between who and whom, lie and lay, its and it's, and other such matters has become "old-fashioned." Fortunately, the student is one who likes to get to the bottom of things, and, with some coaching at home, he knows and can illustrate grammatical terminology and can explain case, intransitive verbs, rhetorical coherence, and the rest. He finds grammar exercises no more difficult than algebra. Put the question right, and he will even admit to some enjoyment in informing himself of some rather complex nuances.

The teacher is not living up to her privilege of exercising stewardship over the gift of language. Like civilization itself, language is always under assault by careless and illiterate people. Shakespeare's rebel Jack Cade wants to kill not only all the lawyers but also the grammarians and manufacturers of paper. Classical humanists from ancient times to the present have always placed a high value on precision and aptness in the use of language. The importance of maintaining such distinctions as tense, number, subject and object, and gender has always been self-evident. In addition, sensible conventions have been adopted about such matters as spelling, punctuation, usage, and style. And since language so largely defines our humanness, it deserves careful monitoring and a great deal of tender loving care. In academia, people who should know better launch movements which focus on peripheral dimensions of language at the expense of the spiritual and artistic power of this great resource. I cite a few examples.



"Why, then, have we become so hospitable to the linguistic libertarians?"

Linguistic detours

Earlier in this century, structural linguists claimed that a Copernican Revolution was as necessary in language as it had been in astronomy. Conventional grammar (still a very workable system) was derided in favor of a scientific assault on language. Words had to be separated from meanings, they said, so that they could be scrutinized for other qualities — sound, pitch, inflection, for example — all nuances that can be taught incidentally in a good communications course. The editors of the Third Webster's International Dictionary also offered a new agenda. "We are manufacturers of dictionaries," said editor Gove, "not custodians of the language." Usage was their mantra, alongside great attention to language changes. They quoted Marilyn Monroe and Joe DiMaggio — people who should have been using the dictionary instead of helping to write it. They even tried to force change; after all, a static language seldom requires a new dictionary. They mistakenly reported that many of the best writers now use "ain't." They abolish outright the classification coloquial and only infrequently designate words as slang — and even then with reservations. They commit a host of other acts of linguistic sabotage as well.

The advent of electronic media, with the vast quantities of writing posted on e-mail, has created a whole new domain of communication. Positively, communication has increased — some of it, of course, very good. Negatively, e-mail encourages a free flow of keyboard characters without the discipline of thought which gives structure to expression. One company boasted that electronic mail has helped workers add 1.8 hours to their working day "because they took less time to formulate their thoughts." No wonder the Dilbert cartoon flourishes.

All these and other forces have encouraged linguistic democracy. We are told that all language belongs to one dialect or another (even the standard language of academia is sometimes demoted to the status of a dialect), and that all dialects are equally legitimate. One decides at what social level he wishes to function and adjusts his speech and writing accordingly. Ignore the possibility that a given notion

deserves to be expressed well for its own sake.

Do we want to speak like the clowns in Hamlet (their bluntness is admittedly refreshing) or the Prince? Whom do you wish for a fishing companion? Mechanics, waitresses, and nursing aids as well as lawyers and doctors are told that they should adopt a level of usage that reflects their social standing. There should be no snobbery — either up or down. The case of Eliza Doolittle, in *My Fair Lady*, comes to mind.

In praise of

Those who are truly at a disadvantage, of course, resent this condescension and realize that they will be frozen in their caste if they fail to pay attention to the arts of speaking and writing and all that this effort requires in the way of pedagogy and models. Benjamin Franklin, who prided himself on his humble origins, became one of the ablest writers of his century by a rigorous program of self-instruction, using Addison's essays as models.

When Samuel Johnson asked the lad who was ferrying him across the Thames River whether he could read and write, the lad said he could not. "And what would you give to be able to do so?" asked Johnson. "Sir," said the lad, "I would give all I have." And even the woman who says, "Teachers, them's my chief dread," admits to some respect for disciplined thought and expression.

It is refreshing to learn that a recent book, *Eats, Shoots and Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*, has become a best-seller in England as well as in the States. (The fun occurs in the very title, where, if one deletes the comma after Eats, he discovers the diet of a panda. The book will be reviewed in the next issue of the journal). The book eschews slovenliness not only in the use of punctuation but in rhetorical casualness as well.

The popularity of the book is refreshing because it reminds us that people deep down do like rules about how we talk and write, that they do not wish to be rhetorical anarchists. Why, then, have we become so hospitable to the linguistic libertarians? Why defend the merely allowable, the least common denominator in writing, a level that, though it will not receive much attention, fails to communicate effectively because it lacks rhetorical felicity? Why sell one's ideas at a discount through rhetorical slovenliness. As Wilcox Follet reminds us, "A writer is not alone what he writes; he is likewise everything that he will not write because he finds it not good enough, and his power may be as much a function of renunciations as of his self-indulgences."

The student who takes the advice of my friend's teacher will forever be hesitant and uncertain about grammatical structures. The friend's son will enjoy the confidence that comes with mastery — the freedom that comes after the first mile of discipline. We do our students a favor by requiring them to hew and hack and chisel away the incorrect, the incongruous, the inexact, the imprecise, the insincere in their expression. What all this comes down to, after all, is a matter of Christian courtesy, a kindly service, and an amiable grace.

Illuminating the Charged Creation with Language

by Leslie-Ann Hales

Leslie-Ann Hales (leslie-ann.hales @kingsu.ca) is an associate professor of English at the King's University College in Edmonton, Alberta.

As part of a team at The King's University College that reviewed core courses leading to Bachelor of Arts degrees, we in the English Department recently undertook to appraise what, exactly, we seek to accomplish in our first-year English courses. While our aim in the discipline is primarily to teach students to be "discerning and appreciative readers of literary works" (*The Contribution of English to the Core*, The King's University College [1]), we also recognise the critical need for students to be able to write and to speak effectively. Faculty members in our department are fully aware that most of our first-year students take these introductory English courses because they are required to do so even though only a minority of students will major in the discipline. However, *all* of our students need to understand how crucial it is that they recognise "the human ability to do things with words as a gift which God has given that we might come to know the fullness of life in Christ." [2] I cannot think of a better reason than this for Christian educators to stress with students the need to cultivate effective spoken and written language.

Language and alienation

Everyone knows from personal experience the capacity of language to distort, to inflict pain, to obscure and to twist truths about ourselves, about the world we live in and, indeed, about God. That is because we live in a world in which the goodness of creation is marred by sin, a world in which we often do not feel a sense of atonement, or "at-one-ment," as the poet William Blake would put it, with God and with others. And yet, no matter how young or old we are, I suspect that we speakers, receivers and writers of language do not often make the critical connection between alienation from others, from the creation and, indeed, from God and the way we use language.

In The King's University College course calendar, our introduction to the study of English observes that, among other things, the "study of literature should ... increase the students' awareness of the wondrous power of language to shape and illuminate (or when improperly used, to misshape and obscure) our place in creation." (TKUC Calendar 104). As Christian educators, part of our mandate surely must be to encourage all students to recognise that their use of language has as much to do with tending carefully to God's creation as does their stewardly care for the environment, their mindfulness of social justice issues, or their nurturing of a personal faith. Bankrupting language by abusing and misusing it undermines and sabotages our mandate to be faithful servants of God's Word and words.

Perhaps this sounds like an extravagant claim, one that seems to have little to do with the daily discourse we all engage in during dozens of encounters every day. Most students (with notable exceptions) *do* recognise a difference between the way they chat with their friends in a coffee shop and the way they speak in an academic class setting. However, the majority of them do not reflect on *why* this is the case or that it might be important to reconsider the way they use language outside of the classroom. Part of our mandate is to help students to understand that speaking and writing effectively has a radical effect on how we can make keener sense of ourselves, of our world and our relationships with God.

Sometimes students respond to our claims about language use that English Department faculty are "just being picky," that we know what they mean when a spoken or written sentence trails off with words like "whatever" or "kinda" or with phrases such as "yeah, well, ya know...." What they do not always understand is the fact that such carelessness contributes to the degeneration of language, to a lack of clarity and to the sort of loss of linguistic meaning that we can see every time we read a newspaper, watch sales pitches in television commercials or listen to the deceptions of political rhetoric.

Linguistic perils

Azar Nafisi in *Reading Lolita in Tehran*,[3] a memoir of her life as a university English professor in Iran in the 1980s and 1990s, repeatedly notes how the Islamic regime under Ayatollah Khomeini "confiscated" meaning from language, especially during the hostilities with Iraq. (189). But she was well aware that this phenomenon was not limited to language under this regime, that it is a danger in any culture, although especially one at war. In her book, Nafisi quotes an interview with Henry James in *The New York Times* on March 21, 1915, just eight months before the end of World War One. In this interview, James said:

The war has used up words; they have weakened, they have deteriorated like motor car tires; they have, like millions of other things, been more overstrained and knocked about and voided of the happy semblance during the last six months than in all the long ages before, and we are now confronted with a depreciation of all our terms, or, otherwise speaking, with a loss of expression through increase of limpness, that may well make us wonder what ghosts will be left to walk. (213-214)

Perhaps such passionate despair over the corruption of language by the language of wartime seems extreme and far from our

own experience of life in contemporary Canada. But what do we communicate to each other when, "post 9-11," we speak about life in "the new normal"? Certainly, anyone old enough to have watched television commentators after the horrifying events of September 11, 2001, would dispute the claim that there is much "normal" about life in these "new" times. What do we say about our value of human life if we allow military and political leaders to describe the deaths of innocent people by "smart bombs" as "collateral damage"?

Does a phrase such as "going postal," a phrase I have heard a student use to describe his angry father upon hearing that his son had failed an exam, not signal a perilous casualness about our sensitivity to the awfulness and horror of senseless murder?

The challenge

Language is a God-given gift, an elemental system by which we create meaning in our imaginations and, thereby, in our personal and communal lives. If an upset father can nonchalantly (and acceptably) be compared with a psychologically unbalanced individual who, in a state of extreme mental derangement, violently takes the lives of innocent co-workers, then we need to be much more vigilant about our own daily discourse.

Language, its extraordinary application and its appalling exploitation, is both a miraculous gift and a major responsibility. Of course, language is also delightfully playful, teasingly ambiguous and mysteriously evocative. In our efforts to cultivate students' abilities to sharpen their skills with language we, in the English Department, draw on a number of different exercises that are designed to provide various opportunities for practising and honing these skills.

Teaching methods

For example, approximately one third of our first-year courses addresses the art of writing expository prose in the context of the study of literature, often pairing students with one another to "workshop" their papers before they submit them. Students respond positively to the challenge to critique each other's writing and, in the process, become more aware of ways in which they can improve their own written clarity. We also have students prepare and present researched answers to issues regarding texts we study and emphasise that these should be carefully written and communicated to the class.

In senior classes, such presentations are more sophisticated, but in all cases, we stress such factors as the conciseness and carefulness of the ideas presented, the judicious use of language as well as other related aspect of communication such as careful clarity, eye contact, body posture, inflection and cadence.

Occasionally, as when we have studied Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, we have organised a court trial of either the monster or of Dr. Frankenstein, which entails students playing the roles of judge, prosecutors and defence attorneys, witnesses, jury members and, of course, the defendant. Students thoroughly enjoy playing these roles and quickly come to recognise just how essential it is for them to put forward their side of the case succinctly and explicitly if they are not to invoke the irritated thumping of the judge's gavel. I am often impressed by how seriously they take their responsibility to submit a well argued case to the jury and how capably they organise their arguments. Invariably, also, the jury listens intently to reasoning from both sides and, in post trial discussion, comments on the effectiveness of the claims of the defence and prosecution teams.

Watching students develop a respect for the capacity of language to shape their experience of relationships with others, to describe their world, to express their faith, and to reflect the aesthetic aspects of human experience is gratifying. Beyond that, however, I hope that one of the things my students learn is the sheer exuberance embodied in language, an exuberance one cannot value without mining the profundity of language's mystery. Paul Engle wrote about the character of poetic language, that it is "...boned with ideas, nerved and blooded with emotions, all held together by the delicate, tough skin of words" (*New York Times* Feb. 17, 1957).[4] I would go further and contend that *all* language has this potential if we only listen more closely and more faithfully.

References:

1. English Department Faculty. "The Contribution of English to the Core." The King's University College. Winter 2004.
2. *Ibid*
3. Nafisi, Azar. *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. New York: Random House, 2004.
4. Engle, Paul. *Simpson's Contemporary Quotations*. Bartleby.com. July 7, 2004 <http. //bartleby.com/63/50/7150.html>

Note: The title of this article hints at a line in the poem "God's Grandeur" by Gerard Manley Hopkins: "The world is charged with the grandeur of God. /It will flame out, like shining from shook foil." From *Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1981. 27.

Deliberate Dissonance:
the Path to Shalom

by Gerard Fondse, Jr.

Gerard Fondse (jfondse@calvin.edu) is assistant professor of English at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

He stands there, "a minstrel man," fire-blackened, with the fierce grin of thin joy carved permanently on his face. His unquestioning glee is anchored in his ability to deny his curiosity, to bury his desire to ask questions. His is a world devoid of books, devoid of questions — a world of averted glances supported by generations of fear. Ray Bradbury's claim that it is a pleasure to burn is probably true, but the plot turns in a mere page or two when *Fahrenheit 451's* main character, Guy Montag, rounds a corner on his way home from the fire department and, in an instant in which the odor of kerosene is swallowed by the fragrance of strawberry and apricot, bumps into Clarisse, his seventeen-year-old neighbor. Hers was a world of "Why?" — a place of danger and dissonance — and her stifled academic curiosity was about to collide with his dull-witted, code-enforced apathy. She simply asks him if he is happy, and, in response, his thin veil of artificial joy evaporates. Later, just before Montag's house is to be burned as required by law because he had been secretly caching and reading books, as Fire Captain Beatty jabs his rhetorical index finger into Montag's chest, smirking, "She chewed around you, didn't she?", only then does the reader suddenly recognize that in the novel's opening scene, the early chance encounter with Clarisse on the sidewalk after work, the question that fed Montag's growing dissonance was clear. Clarisse had asked him if he was happy. He was baffled by his inability to respond, and his world of carefully sheltered, fearfully embraced simple answers was about to collapse.

Souls without questions

Some say that in some contexts, college freshman English might work well as a gatekeeper, as one of those courses designed to keep out those who cannot cut it as an undergraduate student. Those claims might

be true, but perhaps the reasons for those claims may not be what folks assume. For many incoming freshmen, the college writing experience is indeed rugged and daunting because of issues of grammar, syntax, and rhetorical beauty. Perhaps some have not yet been asked to read and write analytically. But perhaps this rhetorical journey is more daunting because it hasthe potential to "knock the fire hose out of their hands." Perhaps many young scholars arrive on campus with minstrel grins on their faces and no questions in their souls. For these, the college writing experience is even more traumatic because it is a transition to an exciting but unsettling journey, one that was not anticipated, one that perhaps had not been part of the high school adventure.

Maybe Ray Bradbury comes chillingly close to getting it right when, through the voice of that same Fire Captain Beatty, he cynically claims: "With schools turning out more runners, jumpers, racers, tinkerers, grabbers, snatchers, fliers, and swimmers instead of examiners, critics, knowers, and imaginative creators, the word 'intellectual' became the swear word it deserved to be." To catapult from a world in which "intellectual" might be a swear word into a world of the challenging juxtaposition between "thesis" and "antithesis" might be most unsettling for a young scholar three months out of high school; and it might be this trauma that leads some to refer to freshman English as a gatekeeper course, one that separates those who can from those who cannot.

Face the opposition

A central skill that is discovered, examined, and honed in college freshman English, a skill that must be nurtured in any reformed Christian educational endeavor, is the proficiency with which one can consider an issue, articulate a thesis, and construct the argument that shapes that thesis. The shaping of this thesis, however, suggests the presence of an antithesis. And at precisely this spot in the road, the speed bump might be most jarring. For all reformed Christians, the ability to recognize and understand the antithesis is essential

but essentially difficult; for some it is even so threatening and can generate such hysteria that the desire to grab the kerosene-filled fire hose is overwhelming.

Some young reformed Christians have never seen this intellectual nimbleness modeled in high school, and, consequently, the journey into scholarship is made even more difficult. To confront the antithesis, to recognize its existence, is to suggest that the person holding the antithetical position might have arrived at it with some validity, and that his or her argument needs to be engaged. Out of fear, then, it becomes tempting to embrace the notion that either the antithesis does not exist, or that the one who holds the antithesis is dangerous. And to enforce that notion, antithetical scholarship can be and has been denied, ignored, or even punished. To light a fire of destruction is easy, immediate, and perhaps even considered righteous.

A just response

What we are left with, then, is the choice between two options. We can write curriculum that generates the rhetoric of a Hallmark greeting card, or we examine dangerous juxtapositions. To do this deliberately, and with grace, is the blessing with which we can bless our students. To create rhetoric that is redeemed and confident without hysteria and polemic, this path is difficult. As mentors, we must model justice. The fires we start are not measured in degrees Fahrenheit. But, oddly enough, the path of intentional dissonance is the true path to shalom, to peace. Redemption can come no other way. Our success is measured by the number of fire hoses we can knock out of the hands of our future leaders, fire hoses that can be replaced with redeemed pens, confident, grace-filled hearts, and a vision of justice that cannot be moved.

At the end of the novel, our main character, Guy Montag is reading this passage from the book of Revelation: "And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."

At times, the leaf of a freshmen essay does contain such healing.

Can A Text Mean Anything?

by Bert Witvoet

I recently wrote a column for our local newspaper which I want to make available to teachers of worldview in our Christian high schools. The context is Canadian, but I'm sure my American friends can adapt the argument to the U.S. situation. Worldviews know no borders (ever heard of doctrines without borders?). I'm indebted for a fair bit of the content to an article entitled "'Truth' on Two Hills" that appeared in the July 2004 issue of Christianity Today*)*

There is a curious story in the Bible that may well cause you to scratch your head — if that's how you express puzzlement, that is. King Ahab of Israel, known as an evil ruler, wanted to retake the city of Ramoth Gilead from the king of Aram. But before he went into battle, he wanted to consult the Lord (as you know, there are no atheists in foxholes). In those days you did that by asking prophets to see whether it was a good idea or a bad one to fight a certain battle.

Now there were quite a few false prophets around who would usually tell the king what he wanted to hear. In this instance, they told him to go ahead because, they said, the Lord would give the city into the king's hand. But one prophet named Micaiah, who was known as a prophet of the Lord and who would tell the truth rather than what the king wanted to hear, told Ahab that he saw Israel scattered without a shepherd. In other words, Israel will lose the battle and you, Ahab, will be killed. He added that he had seen a vision in which God had sent out a lying spirit to all the other prophets and that, by doing so, God would cause the evil king to make a big mistake and be killed. In fact, that's what happened. Ahab put his trust in the false prophets and got killed.

Superfluous intent

Why am I bringing up this story? Mainly because I believe that there are still lying spirits around who manage to fool a lot of people. God allows these spirits to pull the wool over people's eyes for his own purposes. Half a century ago, National Socialism was such a lying spirit, one that worked through Adolph Hitler and his henchmen. It promised the supremacy of the Aryan race and a better world for those who were "fortunate" enough to be Germanic, like myself, except that I know firsthand what Nazism did to my native land, Holland. Communism was another lying spirit, one that promised a worker's paradise and brought nothing but Gulags, suppression of religion and the collapse of economic systems.

Today we encounter many competing lying spirits who promise happiness but end up causing destruction. One such lying spirit goes under the heading "The Intentional Fallacy." It has a large following in Western societies. What "The Intentional Fallacy" teaches is that "whatever an author may have meant or intended to say by his or her written words is now irrelevant to the meanings we have come to associate with the meaning of the text" (from "'Truth' on Two Hills," *Christianity Today,* July 2004).

Short-lived truth

In other words, anyone has the power to decide what the meaning is of any original text, whether that be the Bible, the Charter of Human Rights or centuries of understanding.

If, for example, the Bible speaks out against homosexuality, then modern theologians can declare that they need not bother with the original intent of Scripture. They can decide what a certain text means for us today. Theologians who follow that philosophy can thus bless same sex unions.

If the Charter of Human Rights does not talk about discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation but on the basis of sex, then our judges can ignore the original intent and insert "sexual orientation" as being included.

If for centuries we have understood "marriage" to mean a union between a man

and a woman, then what prevents us from disregarding that understanding and calling marriage a union between two persons? Stay tuned. One of these days we will be asked to reinterpret marriage to be a union between three or four persons. Why should polygamists be discriminated against?

No transparency

What "The Intentional Fallacy" worldview does is cut us off from centuries of wisdom while pretending that we are fully within the spirit of the original books and statements of wisdom. This may seem harmless to people who have no respect for the past, but wouldn't it be more honest to admit that you want nothing to do with ancient wisdom and authoritative texts, rather than pretend that you take them seriously?

If theologians, for example, want to bless same-sex unions, let them openly admit that they have chucked the Bible on this matter and do not respect its authority. That way, at least, those people who recognize the authority of the Bible are not fooled.

Why allow judges to read into the Charter what was not there to begin with? Why doesn't Parliament pass new laws, or write a new charter — actions that would legitmate same-sex unions? That way there can be an honest debate rather than a sleight-of-hand re-interpretation of something that carries the authority of what some call "a sacred document."

But, then, a lying spirit by its very nature does not want transparency and honesty.

Boomerang point

By the way, there's an interesting anecdote in the article "'Truth' on Two Hills" I referred to earlier. The author recounts an incident with a professor who taught him "The Intentional Fallacy" philosophy. She asked him a question on a mid-term exam. The author went on to answer a different question. He got a failing grade, of course. But then he went to see the professor to challenge her mark. He told her that, according to "The Intentional Fallacy" philosophy, which she espoused, he could put his own meaning into the question she had asked. To try to determine what she had meant by the question was a fallacy. The professor, who was not amused, refused to change the grade.

Ah, yes, so much for trying to convince a lying spirit.

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Should Teachers Ever Preach the Truth?

Clarence Joldersma (cjolders@calvin.edu) professor of education at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI, asked the Dot Edu panel: "What is the difference between teaching and preaching? Are Christian school teachers really preachers in disguise, or is teaching at a Christian school really something different from preaching? In other words, what is the "teaching" character of Christian teaching? What is its relation to indoctrination, and what is its relation to teaching students to think for themselves?"

August 7, 2004


Johanna Campbell

Hi, Clarence: This is a huge debate! Let me begin with a few Scripture passages: "God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe." (1 Cor. 1:20-25). Also: "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?" (Rom. 10:14-15) It was God "who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up." (Eph. 4:9-13) Notice how the pastor-teacher gift is lumped together?

I think teachers are pastors at times, and they should be. They are certainly called to be prophets, priests and kings and in those offices some of the pastoral and teaching functions overlap. Showing compassion, opening up the truths of God's word, guiding, nurturing the flock (students), loving and caring for them for the sake of Christ ... there are myriad places where these two gifts overlap.

Could this (what a scary thought!) lead to indoctrination? Of course it could, and perhaps it should! If we train up our children as we are admonished in Deuteronomy 6, we are to impress (yes) God's commands upon the hearts of our children. We are to talk about them when we sit at home, when we walk along the road, when we lie down and when we get up. The commands of God are to be tied as symbols on our hands, bound upon our foreheads and written on our doorframes and gates. If that isn't indoctrination, what is?

Ken Bradley, in his "Indoctrination and Assimilation in Plural Settings," defines indoctrination this way: "the intention of the teaching activity is to bring about in the student unshakable or unquestioning belief in an idea, regardless of the veracity of that idea." When we teach the word of God, we want our students to have that kind of unshakable faith. We do allow them to have questions, of course. When it comes to forcing these ideas, by means of punishment, let's say, then we are going too far. The only tool we have of getting God's Word to be imprinted on their hearts is prayer. Our deepest desire is that they should come to Christ, to know him in all his richness and see how everything holds together in him. However, we must give them the freedom to come. The Holy Spirit is our comforter and ally in this process of preaching and teaching!

Johanna

August 9, 2004


Lois Brink

Hi, Johanna: I have two things to add.

One is that I confess I really don't know what preaching is, by clear definition, but I can say that most of my colleagues do not consider themselves preachers in the classroom. In fact, they might say that they do not preach.

What they do is model, discuss, point out, remind, reframe redemption or restoration or discernment. What they do is support, nurture, challenge. What they do is teach about, work with, have students learn about, understand, apply, synthesize, and make the material their own. Is this the same as your ideas about prophets, priests and kings?

Lois

August 11, 2004


Tony Kamphuis

Hi, all: We do tend to have an idea of preaching as someone standing at the front of a group proclaiming, "Thus saith the Lord...." Around these parts, I think preaching and teaching are becoming a little conflated, but it appears that is because the preachers are becoming more "teachy," rather than vice versa.


Clarence Joldersma

It doesn't matter, though, if the two become more similar, since those engaged in both activities are trying to have their audiences hear God's Truth and apply it in their societies and lives.

I guess I'd like to hold out this one point of distinction: preachers are speaking to a more mixed audience and are aiding some in the process of sanctification, while urging others to respond to God's tug and experience a "turn around" or conversion. In schools we are taking young covenant children that are used to "drinking milk" and strengthening their faith so that they can move on to "solid food." We are operating at a different point in the lives of our charges. (Did someone say "presumptive re-generation"?)
Tony

August 11, 2004


Pam Adams

Johanna and Lois, I really agree with both of you, even though you both seem to be answering the question in different ways. I agree with Lois when she says that most teachers see themselves as being modelers of the Christian life. Lois says teachers support, nurture and challenge students. But does that not fit with what Johanna is saying? Don't preachers do these things as well. Whenever we speak about behavior and attitudes based on biblical principles, we are attesting to the truth of the gospel. Whenever we glory in the grandeur of Creation, we are "preaching" the wonder of our Creator. I think teachers might not want the label of preacher because it might imply forcing Christianity onto our students. Of course we would all disagree with this approach. However, one of the best ways to present the gospel is by living it each and every day. Being fair and concerned, and speaking the truth, is the way to disciple.
Pam

August 14, 2004

I may not have as much of a "hang-up" with appearing to "force" Christianity on our students. First, those who think we are doing this mistake the likelihood of the effectiveness of that approach, but conversely those who are afraid of such an approach tend to have a view of humans as autonomous beings that can "pick through" the life approaches available and make their selection "unforced." That seems inaccurate based on experience and scripture.
Tony

August 16, 2004

Hi, all: I do not believe that the Christian school classroom is the place for "preaching." I do not believe that the Christian school mission is to evangelize. I believe the mandate of the Christian school is to teach covenant children — that is, children of believing parents — from a Christ-centered worldview. We must teach discernment, communication, thinking skills, community living, justice issues, ethics, and scientific problems — all from the point of view that each subject, just as everything that exists, belongs to Christ. We can teach any subject under the sun, every book published, any scientific theory as long as we put it under the authority of the Word of Christ. That is the school's mission; preaching is not. Preaching is for the pulpit and worship, teaching is for the classroom and learning.


Agnes Fisher

That is not to say that they cannot in some ways overlap. But essentially, the teaching we do must be varied in style and approach, depending on the learning styles of those in the classroom. We must reach students on all levels with lessons geared to teach them how to think, how to work together, how to apply knowledge to other situations, how to read, how to listen and how to know the difference between what is good and what is evil. All this, and an abundance of knowledge about an abundance of subjects, is what schools must do. Preaching in church, teaching in school.
Agnes

The panel consists of:

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

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ROOM 219

Nancy Knol
Column Editor
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Goodbye, Hello

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

As I write this column, we are very close to the end of the school year. It seems odd to think that I am writing this for the first issue of a *new* school year — that seems an eternity away, and, to be honest, it is a bit overwhelming to try to mentally skip summer and enter the mindset of fall. All the same, I am conscious of how eager and optimistic and nervous we all feel as we anticipate new students, perhaps a different teaching assignment, and all the responsibilities and possibilities that lie before us. *Can we do it again?* we wonder. After the first class period we know we can.

By contrast, I am sitting at the computer now and thinking of all that I still have to get done before exams. Increasingly there are days in the teacher's lounge when we all complain about being "put upon" in some way by our restless students, and, invariably, someone finally says, "Must be May — we're all sounding hostile."

It seems fitting somehow to remind myself of the good things that can come only at this time of year. For example, every year in May we have our school's Fine Arts Week. The writing and music and drama are all the best of what began with hopeful uncertainty last fall. Some students developed gifts they have been concentrating on for some time already, and some have discovered gifts they never knew they possessed. The art work at our school is truly remarkable. The art teacher puts up folding display panels all over the upper commons, and his students help him hang pictures and place various sculptures on small pedestals or in display cases. Students come by and marvel. We have never had anyone deface or mar the work in any way. It is as if there is an unspoken agreement to respect and celebrate so much beauty.

There is a final chapel that is planned by the seniors coming up soon, too. Often it is a time of testimony, and the testimonies are full of gratitude. Sometimes a student who was so timid in ninth grade stands before the podium as a senior, and I am awed by how much can change in four short years.

I could go on. Ninth-graders have reached a new level of maturity. First-year staff members are beginning to feel more at home. Students can be found in small pockets during breaks signing yearbooks and remembering important or humorous moments that need to be recorded there. The hellos of September are becoming the goodbyes of June. And everyone is exhausted, but also a bit nostalgic. Teachers will watch graduates stroll across the stage and feel a mixture of rejoicing and regret.

I am reminded of one of my children's favorite stories by the enchanting Arnold Lobel. It is called "The Garden," out of the *Frog and Toad* series. Frog gives Toad some seeds for a garden, and Toad eagerly plants them. He looks expectantly to see them coming up, but nothing is happening. So he shouts, "NOW SEEDS! START GROWING!" But still nothing happens. He tries to coax them with candles and stories and poems and songs. He concludes that the seeds are afraid to grow, but Frog assures him that they just need some time. And when the seeds finally do poke their heads above the soil, Toad is ecstatic. But he is also extremely tired. He tells Frog that growing is very hard work.

Indeed it is. As a new year begins, we must remind ourselves that we are mostly about planting for now. We must work faithfully, light candles in dark places, and trust that God, in his good time, will bring forth yet another harvest.

Message in a Bottle

Castaway Communication: Mass Media in the Classroom

by Craig E. Mattson
(Trinity Christian College)

CraigMattson(Craig.Mattson@trnty.edu) is assistant professor of Communication Arts at Trinity Christian College in Chicago, Illinois. His article is based on a talk he gave at a multi-school conference on TV and video presentations in the classroom.

We have it on good authority that no man is an island, but sometimes a professor's office feels like one. The publishing companies make sure that wave upon wave of brochures, e-mail, voice-mail, and boxes of books all lap up on our desks. I, for one, am an ironic castaway. As a recipient of communication textbooks, I face waves of mass media purporting to teach me how to deal with waves of mass media. (All right, so I'm a castaway given to exaggeration as well as irony — but I do have a lot of new textbooks.) Fortunately, few public speaking texts are guilty on charges of originality. Spin my office chair, and I have six such books within easy reach, two of which were just minutes ago shrink-wrapped — the beached educator's equivalent to a message in a bottle. Turn to the sections on using mass media in speeches, and here's a sampling of what's to be had:

(1) Know the available equipment.

(2) Rehearse with the aid before you begin to speak.

(3) Cue and edit your materials before you begin to speak.

(4) Introduce media into your speech only when you need it.

(5) Speak to the audience, not to the screen.

(6) Avoid nifty but pointless extras.[1]

Because I study and teach rhetoric, or the art of persuasion, I tend to evaluate educational tools by whether they make persuasion happen in the classroom. At least, at the outset, what these public speaking textbooks offer sounds pretty convincing: a fully functional strategy of preparedness, procedure, and competence. Simply by pressing "play," you demonstrate, in slow motion if needed, how a machine or an institution or an intestine functions. What's more, you gain and keep your students' attention — and all without the aid of firearms. But, of course, these public speaking texts offer the teacher more than technical advice. They also emphasize three rhetorical concerns: purpose, evidence, audience.[2]

Support your claims

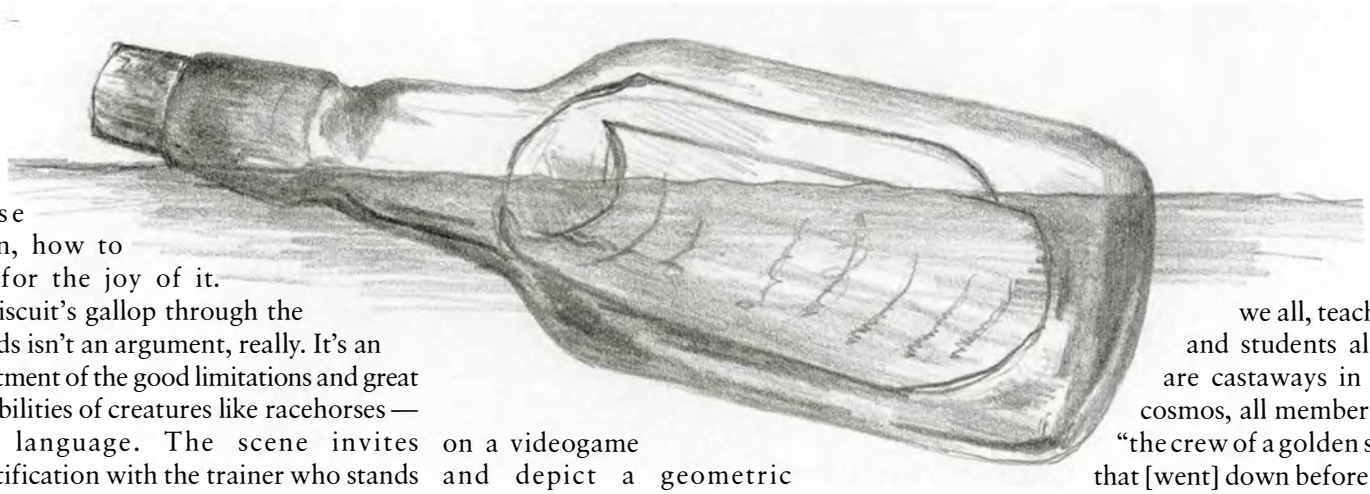
The first concern requires that the media have a definitive goal in the classroom: to make persuasion happen. Not to wake students up. Not to serve as a reward for doing homework. Not to add to teacherly hipness. Everybody likes alert students who think the teacher is cool, but the media ethic just described works best if you use media to serve the purposes of your classroom argument. Explaining what I mean by "classroom argument" turns us to the second rhetorical concern, evidence. It's tempting to think of the media as flannel graph boards on amphetamines, but a more adequate approach is to see the media as evidence, as reasons you offer to support your in-class claims in history or science or math. Of course, teachers tend to worry about the third concern of rhetoric, audience, quite a lot. They worry if documentaries on, say, the Vietnam War will give students nightmares or, conversely, give them the best REM they've ever had.[3] So much for purpose, evidence, and audience as guidelines for classroom media use.

Right about now, you're wishing this article had a fast-forward button. The advice on offer here sounds like a five-paragraph assignment in your freshman composition course: state your thesis, give your supporting reasons, and finish with a clincher. Point-proof, point-proof, point-proof, case closed, class dismissed.[4] Not only does this model of persuasion tend towards tedium, but it often positions you over against your students in a contest that somebody has to lose. But what happens if we look for a different notion of persuasion — one that has less to do with *Gladiator*[5] and more to do with *Castaway*?

Running for joy

Take rhetorical purpose for starters. What if the purpose of mass media is not so much to win curricular arguments as to cultivate in your students a sense that the subject at hand connects with them? Rhetoricians, especially those who admire Kenneth Burke, call this *identification*. Before a speaker can convince her audience, she needs to achieve affinity with them and with the subject matter. Let's say you're trying to teach subject-verb agreement, but your students are balking at the apparent arbitrariness of the rules. "When I talk to my friend," one of your students explains, "he don't need no grammar book to figure me out." Now, in the model of persuasion described above, I might counsel you to show a documentary on the job prospects of people who put singular nouns with plural verbs. *That* should show them. But what if you're trying to help your students to admire and to work with the tendencies of the English language?

Richard Weaver describes language as a horse that can be ridden only if you understand what it's able and willing to do.[6] Just a guess on my part, but your students probably don't see language as a glorious, muscled creature. To convince them otherwise, you could begin with a clip from *Seabiscuit*, particularly the scene where Red Pollard and the trainer show the discouraged race horse how to be a



horse again, how to run for the joy of it. Seabiscuit's gallop through the woods isn't an argument, really. It's an enactment of the good limitations and great capabilities of creatures like racehorses — and language. The scene invites identification with the trainer who stands quietly next to Seabiscuit and learns what is needed to give this strong glorious creature its head. It invites identification with the jockey who learns that created things can give chase to joy even off the track — or, in your case, outside the classroom.

More than seasoning

Which brings us to the second rhetorical aspect: evidence. Using feature films as a part of your case for mastering the language of Shakespeare sounds like pouring catsup on filet mignon. The proof seems trivial in comparison with the point. But if persuasion begins with identification, then the proof you offer may itself become the point. Put differently, mass-mediated presentations are more than condiments to make the truth tasty. Think Indiana Jones: he's standing on the edge of the precipice with instructions to cross twenty yards of empty air to another cliff's edge. He inhales, closes his eyes, and pushes a foot over the edge — onto a path concealed by optical illusion. He isn't proving a point; he is (in an unusual sense of the word) *making* a point for the people who will come after him.

You do the same in the classroom. Flip on a videogame and depict a geometric theorem. Play a Blink 182 song and show what we the People look like when we can't act our age. Clip a *Frasier* episode to show how the structure of *The Odyssey* still shapes contemporary life. Your mass-mediated evidence is doing more than making your claim probable. It's making it possible.

This reworking of persuasion suggests that audiences, the third aspect of rhetoric, have a habit of closing too early on a given point, mostly because they don't see the claim this point makes on them. You see this tendency every time your students ask, "What do we have to know for the test?" — which turns you into a CEO and your students into secretaries transcribing quirky memos. But when you keep mum on how your Dilbert cartoon explicitly helps prepare for the midterm, you're refusing to stand over against your students, doling out principles and procedures to replicate. Instead, you're standing alongside them, studying the horizon of a good but broken world you and they share in common.

Poetry news

I began by suggesting connections between the mass media and the teacher's castaway condition. If Chesterton is right, we all, teachers and students alike, are castaways in the cosmos, all members of "the crew of a golden ship that [went] down before the beginning of the world."[7] Another writer fond of castaway imagery, Walker Percy, has suggested that messages in a bottle come to us exiles in two categories. One kind of message is *knowledge* — the sort of information that's true everywhere, anytime, 2+2=4 stuff. Mass media can present knowledge very well, especially with the first model of persuasion described above. But if you want to do more than win arguments by avoiding nifty but pointless extras, consider the second model of persuasion. Part of what education is good for is to make clear the nature of our exile after "the fall and disobedience of our first parents," as the Heidelberg puts it. That kind of message is what Percy would call *news*, a communication that lays claim on its hearers not only for exam-prep, but for the rest of life as well.[8] Mass media, I have been arguing, can convey this kind of message by establishing identification, making the truth possible, and recasting the teacher-student relation. Although following my advice may rouse initial student resistance, especially from students who never lose their homework but who seem to have mislaid themselves, the deliberate use of mass media can play the

role of the "despised poems" William Carlos Williams refers to in "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower":

> It is difficult
> to get the news from poems
> yet men die miserably every day
> for lack
> of what is found there.[9]

End Notes

[1] Steven A. Beebe and Susan J. Beebe. *Public Speaking: An Audience-Centered Approach*. 5 ed. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2003. Kathleen M. German, Bruce E. Gronbeck, Douglas Ehninger, Alan H. Monroe. *Principles of Public Speaking*. 15th ed. Boston: Pearson, 2004. Cindy L. Griffin. *Invitation to Public Speaking*. Australia: Thomas Wadsworth, 2003. Stephen E. Lucas. *The Art of Public Speaking*. 8th ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2004. Michael Osborn and Suzanne Osborn. *Public Speaking*. 6 ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003. David Zarefsky. *Public Speaking: Strategies for Success*. 4th ed. Boston: Pearson, 2004.

[2] Rhetorical scholars Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Susan Schultz Huxman identify seven such aspects: purpose, audience, persona, tone, evidence, structure, in their fine work *The Rhetorical Act*, strategies 3rd ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2003. pp. 22-24.

[3] The work of media sociologists Abercrombie and Longhurst implies that when it comes to media consumption, students digest things in unsettlingly different ways. (*Audiences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 1998. p. 31.)

[4] Persuasion understood that way sometimes bites backwards. I still wince at the memory of a presentation I made in a high-school theology course at a day school in Adrian, Michigan. A completely unlooked-for argument broke out over the pronunciation of the word "zoological." (I can't, for the life of me, recall how we got on the subject.) Despite my efforts to defend the pronunciation honored in the American Heritage Dictionary, one student claimed that he had learned his preferred pronunciation on the Discovery Channel. I was smitten hip and thigh. One moral of the tale is that you can stuff your curricular message in a bottle, but your castaway students might have their own bottles to throw at you.

[5] This competitive strain in Western persuasive theory traces back to what rhetorical historian George Campbell calls "the unusual contentiousness of public address in Greece and Rome" (191) in *Comparative Rhetoric: An Historical and Cross-Cultural Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

[6] *The Ethics of Rhetoric*. Davis, CA: Hermagoras, 1985.

[7] *"The Flag of the World." Orthodoxy*. 1908. <http://www.ccel.org/c/chesterton/orthodoxy/ch5.html>.

[8] *The Message in the Bottle*. New York: Noonday, 1975. pp. 119-149.

[9] Williams, William Carlos. "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower, Book I." *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*. Editor. Cary Nelson. New York: Oxford, 2000. p. 200.

Folk Dance: A Counter-Cultural Experience

by Donald Oppewal

Donald Oppewal is emeritus professor of education at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

As a long time observer of Christian schools in the Reformed tradition, as well as a long time participant in it, I have applauded teachers' attempts at being counter-cultural in both curricular and extra-curricular forms of learning. Wanting to be distinctly Christian in their various practices, they are often haunted by the possibility that, despite the school's claim of being different from public schools, its products may not always look and behave so differently. Some research suggests that its graduates engage as much as any others in risky experiments with drugs and sex, for example. This, even while many parents continue to hope that differences in curriculum, teacher, and school climate really do count for something.

I've also applauded the goal of interpreting subject matter in the light of the Christian perspective, although I've often wondered why textbooks of Christian Schools International and other Christian publishers aren't used more widely. One would think that teachers, whether in science or social studies, need all the help they can get in making the Christian perspective dramatically evident to the student. I wish also that there were more evidence that the various teacher journals published to help them were more avidly read and widely discussed around the coffee cups and in faculty or staff meetings.

I use the term counter-cultural to underscore the fact that Christians live in a culture that is no longer greatly influenced by Christian values, and that popular music, TV sitcoms, mass media publications, and the press do not exactly reinforce what both the parents and the preachers prefer for influencing the values and behaviors of the young people.

Combating (or maybe just counter balancing) these influences is the counter-cultural task of the Christian school. Christian school teaching, in this sense, is a subversive activity. Put another way, it tries to show the student that there is a better way than what the dominant culture reveals.

I honor those teachers who know that their students, left to their own devices, will follow trends, some of which are more trash than treasure. Comic books, teen magazines, and recent best sellers are both alluring and readily available.

Teachers who faithfully teach the best in literature class, while ignoring the trash (except maybe for contrast example), are doing their counter cultural assignment.

When music teachers, whether in band, chorus, or music appreciation class, choose class over trash, and faithfully expose students to the best in the culture, they do their counter-cultural task. While students will continue to be attracted to the allure of the latest pop songs and singers, the teacher of music shows a better way.

Parents do the same when they help their young people support the best in the culture through appropriate magazines, through choosing better TV programs. They buy and play in the home the best in both classical and contemporary music, and, thus, do their part in being counter-cultural in their modeling behaviors.

A strange silence

What puzzles me is that neither Christian schools nor Christian parents seem to have followed this same principle of exhibiting the best and leaving the rest when it comes to dance. While assuming leadership in both literature and music, both disciplines seem to have abandoned such a role when it comes to dance, particularly social dance. (Perhaps the ghost of 1928 and the church's condemnation of all dance still hangs over some.)

Ever since the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church adopted a report on dance (*Acts of Synod*, 1982, pp. 566-75), I have heard or read little about its

implication for Christian schooling. Most of that report focused on liturgical dance, that is, dance in and for worship, and many churches have at least experimented with this form of movement to music.

The underlying justification for liturgical dance and for social dance was in that report the same. The report argued that biblical evidence endorsed physical response to life and that this response can take rhythmic and musical forms. The report also indicated that social dance — dancing for social and recreational purposes — can take many forms, not all equally consistent with a Christian lifestyle. While condemning no single form outright, the report's guidelines did favor some forms in terms of how they can be redeemed or how they can support Christian values. Folk dance was identified as the best.

Individual dance, now called line dance, or partner dance, whether contra dance or square dance, would seem to be natural for inclusion in the Christian school. Both in music class and physical education class students can be exposed to what would be the best, whereas on their own they may choose also some other forms, particularly as they become teenagers.

Measured and modest

Anyone who has observed or participated in the various forms that dance can take should have no trouble noticing that the choice of folk dance over other kinds is sound. In its setting, its music, and its movements it virtually eliminates the mix of raucous music, dim lighting, sensuality in movement, and liquor — all associated, in varying degrees, with some other forms of dance.

Using square dance as an example, one could note that its movements require social interaction rather than individualistic idiosyncratic expression done to a pounding primitive beat. Its music is brightly melodic and has energetic rhythm; its lyrics express affirmative human experience rather than focusing on sex, drugs, or rebellion. Sexuality expresses itself in a controlled and measured form rather than in body movements and positions that are overtly provocative. All these add up to a form that is more compatible with Christian sensitivities.

Take the lead

Let the Christian school sponsor dance, both in its curriculum and in its social functions. When Christian teachers and school faculties ignore this area of expression, they abandon the young to follow what the culture exhibits. When senior proms follow what public schools do, then Christian schools abandon their counter-cultural task of showing the better way. They leave the young to follow the culture, since they know no other way to celebrate with musical movement.

Some schools, especially secondary schools, let parents organize dances, and, thus, educators fail their educational task to provide the young not only with subject matter, but also with social skills. Should Christian schools not be leaders rather than bystanders?

Why do school boards and faculties not apply to the dance the principle that serves so well in literature, music, and film? That principle is: foster the best in both the curriculum and in public celebrations so that the young will know that educators can lead, and not merely stand on the sidelines, lamenting the choices made by its younger members.

Teachers for primary grades who wish help incorporating musical manoeuvers into the curriculum may consult two CSI curriculum guides, one for Physical Education K-2 and one for 3-5. Both have ingenious resources for making rhythmic activities a regular element in the school day. The third editions, under the direction of Marvin Zuidema, emeritus professor of Physical Education at Calvin College, are most helpful.

Query

What Role Should Teachers Play in Capital Campaigns?

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

Teachers as leaders

Question # 1

Our school is embarking on a capital campaign, and the committee has approached our staff because we are considered "leaders" in the school community. They have asked for 100 percent participation and suggested some group goals, and have promised to keep the results of our participation confidential. Some of my colleagues wonder if we are really "leaders" in the way these volunteers suggest we are. I support the campaign. What should I say in our informal staff room discussions?

Response:

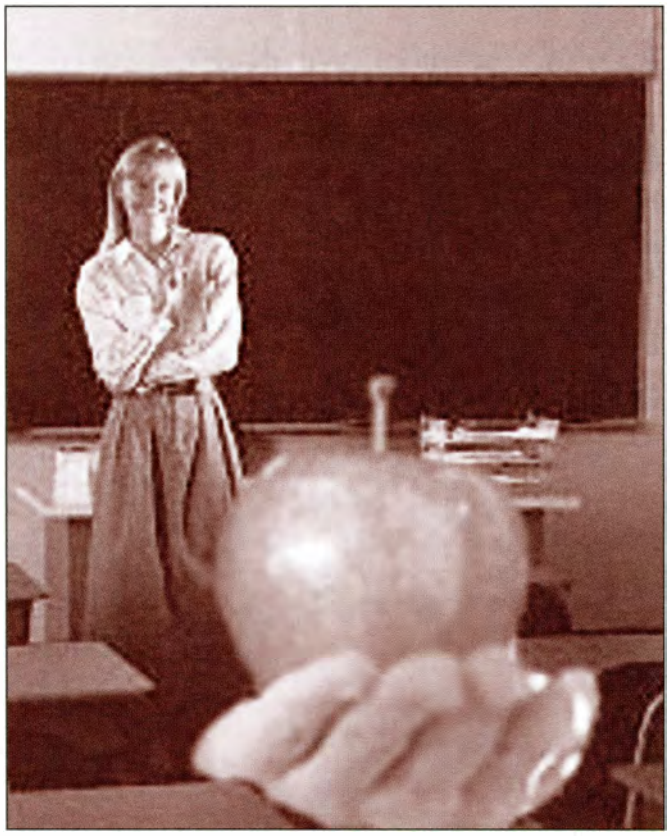
I trust that the capital campaign of which you are speaking is one which is fully supported by your school society membership. I, too, believe that staff members are leaders in the school community, but one may have to define the areas in which they are leaders. If teachers or staff are living up to their calling as professionals, they will be leaders in the area of educational expertise and practice. It is their responsibility to keep up on the current trends in education, to evaluate them, and then put into practice what they have learned so that the students with whom they have been entrusted are able to reach their potential using the gifts given to them by God.

Teachers may also be the leaders in their understanding and elaboration of the school's vision. Their commitment to the school's vision should indeed be exemplary, and in this way they will be leaders in the school community.

The committee responsible for the capital campaign can be commended for setting goals for participation. It might be wise to inform yourselves of all the goals of the campaign. Are the teachers feeling as though they are being singled out? Are goals set for general membership, for local businesses, for community support, and for local churches?

Teachers may well ask, "Are there goals for doctors, realtors, engineers, nurses, and lawyers?" If goals are made public, it may be rather difficult to keep the results of these goals confidential. The trend in business accountability is to make the result of your goals public in order to determine whether the goals have been achieved. Our school board, as an example, sets a goal for fundraising for the year. We assign a goal for each area of the campaign (chocolate sales, golf tournament, Regal sales) and review our funds to date in relation to our goals, at each board meeting.

There is another aspect to giving. God has entrusted us with a certain amount of financial resources. We know that all we have is a gift from our heavenly Father. Each one of us is given the responsibility to manage the gifts which God has given us.



God's Word (2 Corinthians 8) gives us direction in our giving. The Macedonians, out of severe poverty, gave generously and "urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in the service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will." Later Paul says, " for if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have. Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality."

In Proverbs 11 we also read "One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed."

Tena Siebinga-Valstar
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Dividing up extra duties

Question # 2

On our staff a certain number of people seem to take on a disproportionate number of the "extra" duties. That bothers me. But what can I do?

Response:

Am I hearing you say that it is unfair and that you as a teacher don't feel there are enough "extra duties" to go around? If that is the case, your school is unlike any in which I have been a staff member. Or maybe you think that some teachers get off too easily and you are among those teachers who carry a heavy load?

Usually there are many "extra duties", besides teaching, for which teachers are responsible. The equitable distribution of these duties presents a challenge.

When choosing teaching as a vocation, educators seldom realize the number of duties besides actual teaching which will demand their time and energy. Critics of the teaching profession may look at teaching as a 9:00 to 3:30 job, but reality indicates that much more time is involved. A teacher of physical education may be well aware of the time coaching and team sports may require, but it would be unfair if all the coaching of all the sports became the sole responsibility of the physical education teacher.

In order to come to a fairer distribution of extra duties, we tried variations of the following process in two of the schools in which I worked. As a staff we listed all the "extra duties" required of the teachers. Regardless of the grade level at which the duty occurred, it was listed. Each year the school community, including the staff, evaluated the "extra duty" list, deciding whether the activity was still consistent with the vision of the school. We then determined whether the "extra duty" was a major, medium or minimal time commitment, depending on the hours required. Each was given a point value. Coaching volleyball or directing the play, for example, may be considered major commitments in terms of hours and, therefore, receive a value of 5, whereas supervising a gym night may be a minimal time commitment with a value of 1. Dividing the total points by the number of staff members gave an approximate number for which each member was responsible.

Administration will have to factor in full- and part-time staff members, teachers aides, and support staff, and whether the employee is paid by the hour or salary. Some support staff may wish to contribute more than their quota. Extenuating circumstances, such as family or personal illness, may alter expectations. Consideration of fewer duties or sharing of duties may be appropriate for a first-year teacher. Sharing also presents an opportunity to learn what is required.

Teachers need to be involved in the process of determining the point value of each duty, and the way in which the quota per teacher is determined. In addition, they should be given a choice in the duties they will oversee. These procedures can contribute to a greater understanding and cooperation.

Acquiring the services of volunteers, whether parents or community members, helps lessen the load for the teachers. Each of us has been given gifts and talents by God, and if these gifts are used in carrying out the responsibility for extra duties, the task can be completed far more joyfully and fairly. Using the suggested process, or an adaptation of it, may help you and your colleagues come to a more equitable distribution of "extra duties" and greater satisfaction about those responsibilities which are additional to the classroom teaching of your students.

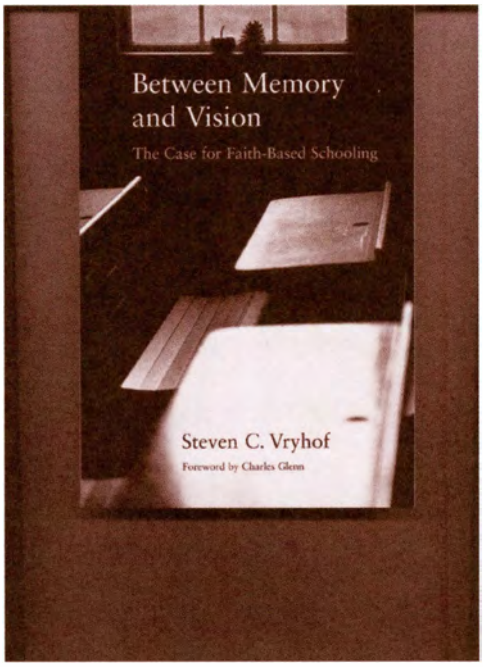
Book Reviews

Steven C. Vryhof, Between Memory and Vision: The Case for Faith-Based Schooling. *Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004. 169 pages, plus CSI statements of faith, and index. Foreword by Charles Glenn.*

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

What must be said right off about this fine study is that it is multi-layered. Vryhof does prod our memory, as the title promises. At one level he takes us back to the Protestant Reformation, by reminding us how that upheaval worked out in the Netherlands, and then by sketching the Dutch migration to America and how the strong convictions of the immigrants led to Christian schools very early in the history of the settlements. But he also addresses the history of education in America — how it came about that the public schools, through a strange marriage of Enlightenment thought and anti-Catholic bigotry in the nineteenth-century, came to monopolize the American school system.

The vision promised by the title is set forth in bold relief. Our world needs the children of faith-based schools — their commitment, their worldview, their sense of how the Kingdom of our Lord needs to shape the kingdom of this world. To achieve this, we need to bring into being what serves as a leitmotif throughout the book — "a functioning community"— a community shaped by a transcendent narrative, by a worldview which addresses ultimate questions and establishes a network of intermediary organizations which give substance to the term "neighborhood." Only in such a milieu, no matter what the physical configuration, can citizens achieve fulfillment and shalom.



Memory and vision, yes. But there is more. What the title does not predict, but implies, is that American education needs a shakeup. More accurately, perhaps, American society needs to find a way to cure its pathologies if we are to resolve the educational crises of our time. And the discourse of the entire book is cast against the background of the moral crisis which is slowly destroying us as a nation. Another layer occurs in Part III of the book, which presents three models of faith-based schools, schools which, despite their differences, are successfully shaping minds that will go out and claim the world for our Lord.

Dysfunctional environment

Vryhof 's scalpel probes the home. How can education take place in a world so sorely bereft of fathers, in a world where television ads rather than lively stories shape the children's minds, in a world where technology sets up children for loneliness and isolation?

How can children learn normally in an environment where children see more of their peers than their parents, and in a society indifferent to the nurture of the next generation? "Without the adult connection, adolescence becomes a never-land, a mall of lost children," says Lance Morrow (24).

Robert Wright puts it this way: "When you're watching TV 28 hours of every week — as the average American does [really?] — that's a lot of bonding you're not out doing." (19) And in all this disarray, of course, faith is marginalized; it becomes a matter of personal preference and taste, an activity (so it is argued) with little relevance for everyday living.

What is more, powerful forces are arrayed against the idea of a functioning community: media domination, geographic mobility, technology, competitive acquisitiveness, runaway consumerism, hedonism, individualism. And this breakdown of communities destroys the moral reinforcements that extended families and close-knit neighborhoods used to provide. Robert Bly observes: "Ours is a sibling society (that) prizes a state of half-adulthood in which repression, discipline, and the Indo-European Islamic, Hebraic impulse-control system are jettisoned...What the young need — stability, presence, attention, advice, good psychic food, unpolluted stories — is exactly what the sibling society won't give them." (22-23)

Loosen stranglehold

Nor will the public school system provide these deep structures of morality and religion — these deepest of human needs. Public school teachers are not permitted to discuss serious issues at the level of religion. Further, as Charles Glenn points out in his introduction, the United States is an anomaly in its refusal to support religious-based education. The reasons are historical — the vision of the Founding Fathers, who initiated the wall between church and state, and of later educators, such as Horace Mann, who wished to unify this diverse immigrant society and to homogenize it. He wanted to supplant traditions and beliefs of parents with the notion of "a common school" which would hold citizens in set patterns.

Vryhof declares that the monopoly of the traditional public school must be broken. Public schools have claimed as their special province the promotion of pluralism and tolerance. But

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these attitudes cannot be achieved — as no virtues can be finally achieved — without a transcendent, religion-based anthropology. As a matter of justice, and social health, and, yes, tolerance, parents need the option of faith-based schools. And these schools need to be publicly funded. The present practice turns the First Amendment upside down. A provision designed to protect religion serves to harm it under the formula "separation of church and state." Practically no other country views matters this way.

Our challenge

Any Christian parent would be pleased to have his child enrolled in one of the three schools described at some length—though they vary considerably. Holland (Michigan) Christian Middle School capitalizes on the first efforts to establish a Dutch Christian School in America. Bellevue (Washington) Christian School has only tenuous roots in the CRC, has a diverse population, and lives in tension between the Reformed CSI camp and the more Fundamentalist ACSI camp. "The Mustard Seed School" in Hoboken, New Jersey, relates the adventures of a more recent experiment—the vision of a Larry Litman to minister to the children of very diverse ethnic groups in a cosmopolitan, urban setting.

A revolution in our nation's approach to education is overdue. But Vryhof also has advice for the Christian schools. We must become more open. We must become "rooted cosmopolitans." We must make our schools attractive to all families interested in the educational philosophy we have formulated so well over these years.

There is yet another layer, a dimension of significance, to this fine study. The quotations which appear at the beginning of chapters and are interspersed throughout provide a pleasant amenity to an already provocative work.

Douglas J. Schuurman, Vocation: Discerning our Callings in Life. *Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans. 2004. 181 pages plus 9 pages of bibliography and index.*

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

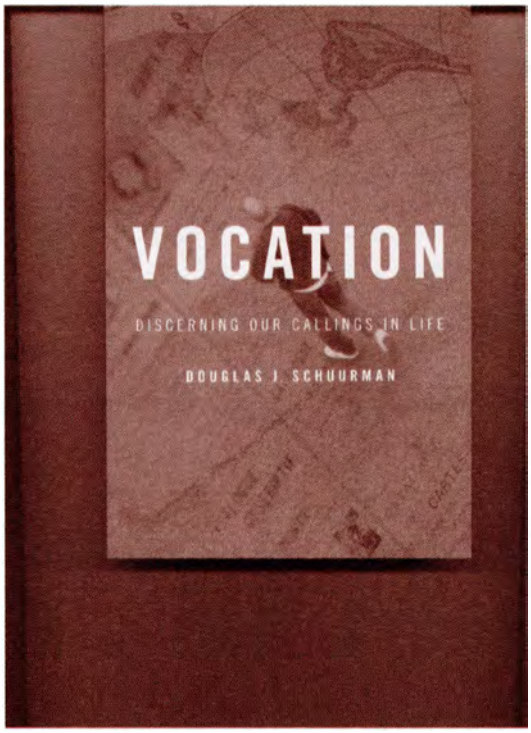
This book can be useful to teachers in several ways. We teach in a tradition that needs undergirding — a tradition which honors all honest and legitimate work, not only church offices, as appropriate vocations which bring pleasure to God. The book can also serve as a reminder that as teachers we are always, wittingly or unwittingly, by example and precept, by attitudes and counsel, through curricula and informally, shaping the way our students will come to discern how to relate to this challenging but wild and confusing and ambiguous world as they come to maturity. And it can serve us as a guide as we continue to reflect on the various promptings to which we ourselves have responded by choosing teaching as a career.

The author, a graduate of Calvin College and Seminary, now a professor at St. Olaf's College, summons us all to a renewal of the Reformation sense of calling, as defined so ably by Luther and Calvin. That sense was obviously much in the air at the time, for Shakespeare could have Falstaff protest — ingenuously, of course — in defense of his nefarious practice of robbing travelers, "Why, Hal, 'tis my vocation, Hal; 'tis no sin for a man to labour in his vocation." Despite the vulnerability of this Reformation doctrine to abuse, Luther's decision to leave the cloister and enter the larger world shook the very foundations of the late medieval church and has had profound implications for the history of the church and society since. Luther proclaimed to all who would listen that the Papacy was having a harmful effect on society and the Church; that any honest work which benefits the world is sacred, incarnational, and sacramental; and that all of life, not just the religious offices, nor only one's paid work, constitutes the believer's vocation.

The notion that all legitimate callings fall under the canopy of one's vocation in the most comprehensive sense has received rough treatment lately, and from some formidable challengers. Schuurman has answers for them. He takes on Jacques Ellul, Stanley Hauerwas, Miroslav Volf, Gary Badcock, and Parker Palmer, who either oppose the Reformation idea or, given the state of the world, question the value and meaning of work beyond its necessity for survival. He gives them their due, but convincingly demonstrates how each one falls short of the comprehensive and magisterial vision of the human drama together with God's gracious invitation for people everywhere to participate in the glorious work of redirecting our fallen world to its original purpose. But Schuurman also finds support for his position. People

such as Robert Bellah, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Karl Barth (whom he quotes frequently), Dorothy Sayers, Albert Schweitzer, and pastoral letters by American Catholic bishops — all these, in one way or another, agree with the Reformers, that the Christian faith obliges us, through our callings, to exercise our commitment actively, in love, to God, his people, and his world.

Schuurman's presentation liberates us from some common errors. We need not ask "for dreams or prophet ecstasies". We should not subscribe to the formula "God has a plan for your life" — in the sense that God has devised an inflexible blueprint which he expects us to discover and follow rigidly. He does not come to us, either, with a set of stern commands about our calling, but by courtly invitation. Nor does he limit one's vocation to "full-time kingdom service" in the narrow sense. He challenges such dualisms as sacred and secular, and the superiority of the contemplative life over manual labor (although in another context, he would surely encourage active recruiting of able men and women for parish work.) To carry out his program, God calls us, first, to become forgiven members of the believing community. He calls us, secondly, to our vocation — both in the role we play (parent, spouse, neighbor, citizen, public servant) and in the actual tasks we undertake.



Full-orbed calling

And vocation is not limited to our paid work. It includes the total of our relationships and all the energies we put forth as we function as members of a redeemed community and fulfill our obligations to love God and neighbor. The call comes to us through mediation, through the very ordinariness of each person's situation, as defined by history, geography, political arrangements, family setting, education, the period of one's life, and his or her array of gifts. He calls us less through some direct visitation than through the arrangements and secondary causes he provides for us. "In the pull of conscience, faith hears the voice of God calling individuals and groups to particular acts of obedience within the varied contexts of life." (63) And this understanding of vocation should relieve us of false guilt when circumstances develop which limit our ability to function as we would like or to exercise our stewardship more generously.

Schuurman carries on his conversation with painstaking thoroughness, subtle nuances, and theological sophistication. This is not a "how to" book with seven ways of determining for what sort of work one is best qualified. His chapter divisions reveal the scope of his concerns. After his introductory chapter outlining his hopes that the churches can salvage the Reformation idea of calling, he outlines the biblical basis for these principles, in both the Old and the New Testament. He then proceeds to supply the theological justification for vocation, followed by a chapter on "Abuses and Proper Uses of Vocation." He spends 65 pages discussing, in two parts, "Vocation, Decisions, and the Moral Life." In that section he deals systematically — and very practically — with the relationship between such subjects as needs, gifts, priorities, and career changes. He also discusses the implications of vocation — how to make one's work create meaning, how to insure a proper context for one's work, how to evaluate the product of one's work, and how to exercise stewardship over the compensation one receives from his work. He follows each of these sections up with thoughts on the transformation required in each of these areas. A brief concluding chapter calls us to spread the power of these ideas to the churches and, indeed, to the whole world.

Yes, our world is badly in need of transformation if we are to carry out our vocation with integrity and meaning. Schuurman is well aware of the self-deception to which we are prone, and to the hostile forces in our world — more powerful now than in the times of Luther and Calvin — which militate against a Christian style of life. He observes, "Abuses of vocation seem as slippery and treacherous as sin itself." (78) This being so, we need to acquire discernment and avail ourselves of all the wisdom the Christian community has to offer. Despite the ambiguities of our world, God's program, in Reformation terms, has not changed. He has not abandoned it, nor are we justified in renouncing it. Rather, He calls us to exert our full energies to transform it, to redeem it, to be agents of his shalom. As he provides us with gifts and opportunities, he will also equip us for the work. And in that spirit, no deed is too small when offered in loving obedience to God's people and the world.